This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

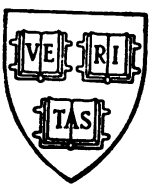
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

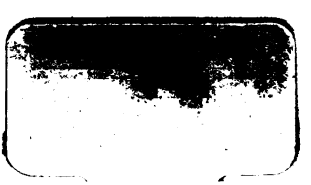
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Slav 4338.2.562



HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY



PENAL SERVITUDE

IN

SIBERIA

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

BURIED ALIVE

OR

TEN YEARS

OF

PENAL SERVITUDE IN SIBERIA

BY

FEDOR DOSTOYEFFSKY

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY

MARIE VON THILO

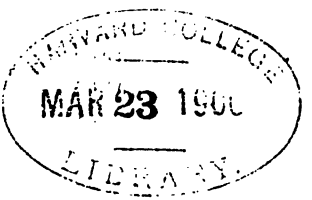
LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1881

All rights reserved

Slav 4338.2.562



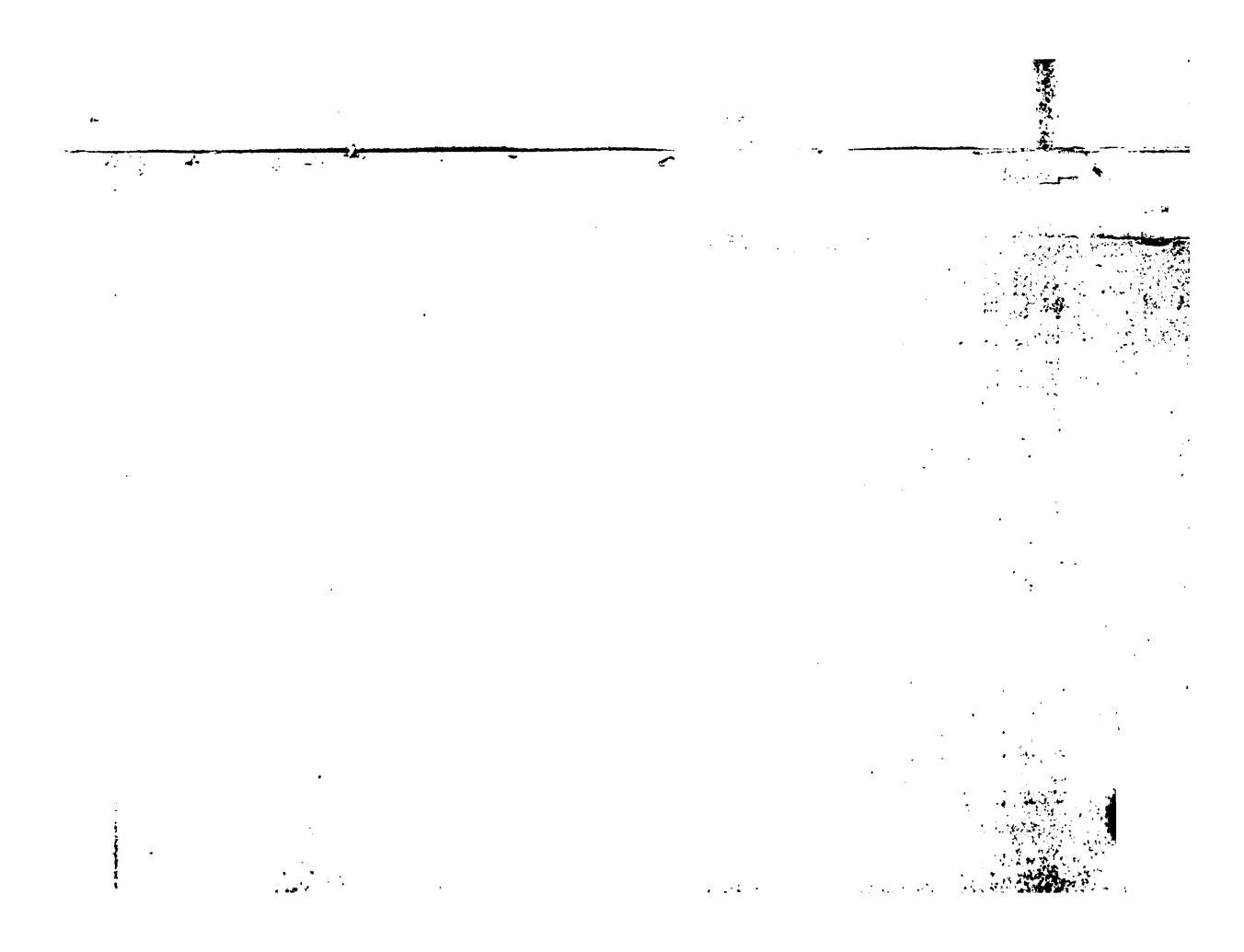
Mrs. J. R. Coolidge.

BOUND JUL 22 1913

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
AUG 21 1984

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER		
I.	My First Impressions	9
II.	My First Impressions (*continued*)	28
III.	My First Impressions (*continued*)	52
IV.	My First Impressions (*continued*)	72
V.	My First Month in the Convict Prison	94
VI.	My First Month in the Prison	110
VII.	I make New Friends—Petr'off	128
VIII.	Luc'ka's History	145
IX.	Issaï Fomitch—I take a Bath—Bakloushin's Tale	151
X.	Christmas Day	174
XI.	Private Theatricals	195
XII.	The Hospital	217
XIII.	The Hospital (*continued*)	235
XIV.	The Hospital (*continued*)	251
XV.	Akoul'ka's Husband (a Tale)	273
XVI.	Summer-time	289
XVII.	Our Pets	310
XVIII.	The Mutiny	323
XIX.	The Escape	338
XX.	I Leave the Prison	354



BURIED ALIVE.

INTRODUCTION.

In some distant nooks of Siberia, hidden away among steppes, mountains, or wild woods, there are small towns, numbering perhaps not more than two thousand inhabitants, with their unpretending wooden houses and one or two churches, one in the town and the other in the cemetery outside. They are more like large villages than like towns. They are inhabited principally by Isprávniks, Tchinovniks, and a host of subaltern officials of various degrees and classes, for in spite of the cold climate Siberia is a nice snug place to live in, as the people are very simple-minded and conservative, innovations are abhorred, and things go on much in the same way as they did two hundred years ago. The Tchinovniks represent the Siberian aristocracy; they are partly Siberian by birth, partly Russians who have been tempted by the prospect of a higher salary and the possibility of making in a comparatively short time a nice little fortune which may enable them to substitute the attractions of

St. Petersburg or Moscow for the simpler and far more patriarchal mode of living in Siberia. But not everyone who goes there for a time likes to settle there for ever. There are some fortunate individuals who have learned the great secret of satisfactorily solving the riddle of life, and they are sure to make Siberia their home, knowing that their attachment to it will in due time bring forth good fruit. But others, who are of a more restless disposition, soon get tired of Siberia, and moodily ask themselves what could possibly have brought them to it. They look forward impatiently to the end of their three years' service, when they immediately apply for another post in Russia, and go back to their own country, where they grumble at Siberia and ridicule it to their heart's content. They are wrong, for after all Siberia is a pleasant country to live in; the climate is excellent, and there are many rich and hospitable merchants and wealthy foreigners scattered about the different towns and settlements. The young ladies bloom like roses, and their morals are excellent. Wild ducks, partridges, and game of all kinds fly about in the streets. In some places the soil brings forth fifteenfold. In short it is a blessed country, but the difficulty is to know how to enjoy it.

In one of these gay and self-satisfied little towns, with its kind-hearted inhabitants whom I shall never forget, I made the acquaintance of Alexander Petróvitch Goryántchikoff. By birth a Russian nobleman, he had been sentenced to penal servitude for ten years for murdering his wife, and after the

expiration of his term had been sent to the convict colony in K—— for the remainder of his days. That is to say, he really belonged to a convict colony at some distance from the town, but had been permitted to reside in K——, where he eked out a small living by teaching French, etc. It is by no means an unusual thing for convict settlers to take to teaching in Siberian towns, where, very probably, French, as well as many other branches of education, would be unknown but for them. I met Alexander Petróvitch for the first time at the house of a worthy, hospitable old Tchinovnik, Ivan Ivanovitch Gvosdíkoff, who had five highly-gifted daughters, to whom Alexander Petróvitch gave lessons four times a week for the sum of thirty copecks a lesson. He was a striking-looking young man, not older, apparently, than thirty-five, small and puny, with an exceedingly pale face, always scrupulously clean and neat in his dress. If you addressed him he fixed his eyes on your face attentively, and kept them there while you spoke, as if he were trying to discover some hidden meaning in every word you uttered, or as if he suspected you of endeavouring to get at his most intimate thoughts. His answers were always clear and short, but every word seemed to have been so carefully weighed and considered, that you could not help feeling rather uncomfortable while the conversation lasted, and relieved when it was over. I at once asked Ivan Ivanytch about him. He told me that Alexander Petróvitch was a very well-educated man, and a perfect gentleman in his manners and behaviour,

else he would not have asked him to teach his daughters, but that he was a great misanthrope, and though he was considered very clever, and had read a great deal, he hardly ever spoke to any one, and it was most difficult to draw him into conversation. There were some people who even suspected him of being mad, but they would hardly have found fault with him for that. He was a great favourite with many of the best families in the place, and might have made himself very useful by writing petitions, etc. It was generally believed that he belonged to a good old Russian family, and that he had many friends and relations still living; but he had resolutely broken off all communication with them. His history was well known. He had murdered his wife in a fit of jealousy, and immediately given himself up to the police. (This had considerably mitigated his sentence). Such crimes are never judged harshly in Siberia, but rather looked upon as an unfortunate accident which ought to be pitied and regretted rather than punished. Still, this strange man persisted in keeping aloof from everybody, and only left his house to go to his lessons. I paid little attention to him at first, but gradually began to feel a stronger interest in him. There was something indescribably mysterious about the man. It was next to impossible to carry on a conversation with him. He always made a point of answering my questions as if he considered this his first duty, but somehow or other I never cared to go beyond our first exchange of questions and answers. I remember walking home with him from the house of Ivan Ivanytch one fine summer evening,

when it suddenly came into my head to ask him to come in and have a cigar in my room. I shall never forget the look that came into his face. His usual self-possession seemed to have left him at once; he muttered a few incoherent words, looked angrily at me, then, to my great astonishment, suddenly darted across the street and disappeared. From that time he always looked frightened whenever we met. Stupidly enough I still persisted in my efforts to become more intimate with Alexander Petróvitch, for he attracted me wonderfully. One fine day, perhaps a month after our little adventure, I called on him on my way home from the post-office. He lived somewhere on the outskirts of the town, in the house of an old woman, whose family consisted of a consumptive daughter and her illegitimate child, a pretty little girl about ten years old, whom I found sitting in Alexander Petróvitch's room. He was teaching her to read. My unexpected entrance seemed to startle him as much as if I had caught him in the act of committing some fearful crime. He jumped up from his chair and stared at me for a few minutes before he had regained his self-possession sufficiently to ask me to sit down; and when we both sat down at last, he kept watching every one of my looks as if he suspected them to be fraught with some mysterious meaning. I understood why the people thought he was mad. No one in full possession of his senses could have shown his suspicions so plainly. He regarded me steadfastly with an expression of hatred in his face, as much as to say, 'When will you begone?' I tried to talk about our town and the

latest gossip; he remained silent, and only smiled viciously. I soon found out that he not only knew nothing of the current news, but did not even wish to know them. Once, but only once, I saw a new light come into his eyes when I offered to lend him some of the books and magazines which I had just brought from the post-office. He looked wistfully at them, but refused my offer, saying he had no time for reading. When at last I left him I felt as if a heavy burden had been removed from my heart, and I could not help feeling vexed with myself for having intruded upon the solitude of a being whose whole aim was to keep away from everybody. I had seen hardly any books in his room, so that the people must have been mistaken when they spoke of his reading much. Once or twice driving past his window late at night, I saw a light in the room. What could he be doing at that time of night? Could he be writing something? And if so, what was he writing? Circumstances obliged me to leave the town for three months, and when I came back in the winter I found that Alexander Petróvitch had died in the autumn. He died as he had lived, alone, and refusing to see even a doctor. He was nearly forgotten in the town, and his room stood empty. I at once called on his landlady, hoping to find out from her what he had been doing and whether he had left any writings. For twenty copecks she brought me a whole basketful of papers which had belonged to him, and confessed that she had already torn up two bundles of papers. She was a surly, taciturn old woman, who could or would give me

little information beyond what I knew already. She told me that her lodger hardly ever opened a book sometimes for months together, but that she would often hear him pacing up and down in his room for whole nights—thinking, she supposed, or talking to himself. He had been very fond of her granddaughter Katya, especially since he had learned that her name was Katya, and every year on St. Catherine's day he had had a mass read for the repose of somebody's soul. He hated callers, and never went out except to his lessons. He had even scowled at her when she had come once a week into his room to dust it, and had hardly exchanged a word with her during the three years he had lived in her house. I asked Katya if she remembered her old master. She did not answer me, but turned her face to the wall and burst out crying. So this strange man had been loved after all.

I took the papers home and spent a whole day looking over them. Three-fourths of them were worthless scraps, old copies evidently taken from copying-books, etc., but I discovered among them a voluminous unfinished manuscript-book which had perhaps been forgotten by its author. It contained the history of Alexander Petróvitch's ten years of penal servitude, and had apparently been jotted down at various times and seasons without any attempt at order or chronology. Occasionally his tale was interrupted by some other story, or by some weird, horrible memories which he seemed to have been compelled by some unknown power to write down. I read these latter over several times; there could

hardly be any doubt as to their having been composed by a madman. But the memoirs of his convict life did not seem to me altogether void of interest. A new world, the very existence of which I had never even suspected hitherto, suddenly dawned upon me; and I read with interest many curious things about the people whom we are accustomed to call the scum and outcasts of the world. Perhaps I was mistaken in supposing that other people might feel not less interested in these memoirs than I was. I will leave it to my readers to judge.

CHAPTER I.

MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

Our prison was situated on the outskirts of the fortress, and almost immediately above the rampart. I used often to look through the chinks in the fence and try and catch a glimpse of the wide world beyond. But all I could see was a little piece of the sky and the high grassy rampart where the sentinels walked to and fro day and night. And then I used to wonder how often during the long years that lay before me I should creep to the fence and peep through the holes and see the same sentinels and the same rampart and the same little bit of blue sky, which, strange to say, did not seem to belong to that sky which we could see from our prison, but rather to some other sky that was far away from us, and under which free people lived.

The courtyard was very large—two hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty wide. It formed an irregular hexangle, and was surrounded by a high fence made of posts pointed at the top. They had been rammed deep into the ground, and stood so close that they nearly touched each other. Across the posts broad planks had been nailed to make the

fence still more solid. This was the outer bulwark of the convict prison. An opening had been left for the gates in one of the sides of the hexangle. They were very strong, and always kept locked and watched night and day by the sentinels. The only time when they were unlocked was when the convict prisoners left the prison to go to their work. Beyond those gates was the fair free world where the people might do as they listed. But to us who lived on this side of the fence that world seemed as unreal as a weird fairy tale. For we lived in our own world, which was unlike anything we had ever heard or seen; we were ruled by our own laws, wore a peculiar garb, and had peculiar customs and habits. Our dwelling-place was not unlike a huge grave where living people had been buried; and I am going to describe to you this abode.

The first thing that meets your eye on entering the courtyard are several buildings. On either side of it is a long one-storied house—these are the barracks where the prisoners live. The furthermost end of the yard is occupied by a similar building. This is the kitchen, which is divided among two *artéls*. A fourth edifice contains the cellars, storerooms, wood sheds, etc. The central part of the yard forms a very large square, where the convicts assemble when the roll is called, morning, noon, and night, and occasionally several times in the course of the day, if the warders suspect mischief or are unable to count quickly. Between the buildings and the fence is a large empty space which was the favourite resort of some convicts, who liked to come

here in their leisure hours, where they were hidden from all eyes, and could indulge in their own sad thoughts. Often, when I happened to meet them on those solitary walks, I would look into those gloomy faces, marked with the brand of eternal shame, and wonder what they could be thinking about. There was one of them, who spent all his leisure in counting the posts of the fence. There were fifteen hundred posts, and he knew every one of them. Each post represented a day, and each day in counting them he omitted one, and calculated from the remaining number of posts how many more days he would have to stay in prison till he had served his term. His greatest delight was to get to the end of one of the sides of the hexangle. He had many years to wait yet, but there is no place like a prison for teaching people to be patient. I remember seeing once a prisoner, who had regained his liberty after twenty years of captivity, take leave of his comrades. Some of his fellow-prisoners remembered him when he had come in first—a light-hearted lad, who cared little for the crime he had committed and still less for his punishment. He left the place a grey-haired old man, with a sad and gloomy face. When he went round to bid his comrades good-bye, he entered each cell without speaking, and, after crossing himself before the ikona,[1] he bowed low before his fellow-prisoners, asking them to think kindly of him when he was gone.[2] I also

[1] Image of a saint, which is always hung up in the east corner of a room.

[2] A Russian phrase. The literal meaning of it is, 'Do not re-

well remember another convict, who had formerly been a well-to-do Siberian peasant. One evening he was suddenly summoned to the gate to see his wife. Six months before he had learned that she had married again, and had been much affected by the news. When he came to the gate she gave him a small sum of money. They stood talking together for perhaps two minutes, when they both burst into tears and took leave of each other for ever. I saw his face as he came back slowly into his cell. We were indeed taught to be patient in the convict prison.

As soon as it began to grow dusky we were ordered to go into our barracks, where we were locked up for the night. I always thought it very hard to have to come out of the fresh air into a long, low, stifling room, which was dimly lighted by two or three tallow candles, and pervaded by a sickening smell. When I look back upon that time now, I often wonder how I could have borne that life for ten years. Three planks on a rude wooden bench filled the space assigned to me. There were several of these benches in the room, and they served as sleeping-places for about thirty men. In winter the doors were locked early, and we had sometimes to wait four hours till bedtime. It is impossible to describe the confusion that reigned during those four hours—noise, shouting, laughter, bad language, the clanking of chains, mephitic smells, and, above all, those cropped heads, branded brows, and ragged clothes looming out of the dim light—everything

member me in anger.' It is frequently used by persons who have been living together for some time and are going to separate.

present seemed to speak of the deepest possible degradation; and yet human beings lived through it all. Man is a being that can accustom himself almost to anything; and I believe that this power of acclimatising himself anywhere and everywhere is one of Nature's greatest boons to her children.

There were about two hundred and fifty convicts in the place, and their number remained pretty much the same. Of course there were always new-comers arriving, while others left the prison, having served their term, and others died. We were the strangest medley of people; and I am sure that there hardly exists a spot or a province in Russia which was not represented in the prison. A few of the convicts were foreigners, and several belonged to the half-wild mountain tribes which inhabit the Caucasus. We were all divided into different classes or departments, according to the crimes we had committed. The majority of the convicts had been sentenced to perpetual exile after the term of their punishment had expired. These wretches bore on their branded brows the abiding mark of their shame; they had lost everything, down to the rights of a human being—society had cast them off for ever. They came to us as a rule for ten or twelve years, and then were sent to the settlements in the interior of Siberia. Some were military prisoners who had not yet lost all civil rights, and only remained with us for a short time, when they returned to their regiments. But the majority of them had so well profited by the teaching they had received from the more experienced

gaol-birds that they were frequently sent back to us for twenty years or more. This class of convicts went by the name of the 'Constant Department,' and they had not lost all civil rights. There was finally a third class, consisting of criminals of the lowest order, chiefly military, which was called the 'Special Department.' These miserable wretches knew that they had been sentenced to penal servitude for life, and would frequently say to the other convicts: 'You will have done your work some time or other and then go away, but we must stay here for ever.' I have been told, however, that this 'department' has been abolished since, as well as many other things that existed in my time.

Many a year has passed away since I became a convict, but the memory of that time seems to haunt me like a terrible dream. How well I remember the moment when I first crossed the threshold of the convict prison! It was one afternoon in December; the early evening had closed in, and the convicts were coming home from their work. A tall moustached subaltern officer unlocked the gates of the strange house where I was to spend so many years, and suffer what I had never imagined I would have strength to bear. I had always rather suspected prisoners of exaggerating when they spoke of the misery of being never allowed to be alone, not even for a moment. But I soon enough began to realise the horror and misery of this enforced companionship. When I went out to work an escort accompanied me, and when I came home I was shut up with two hundred fellow-sufferers, and never alone—

no, not for a moment. But there were worse things yet to which I had to get accustomed.

I have said before that there were among us criminals of all kinds and classes, beginning with the man who had slain his adversary in a moment of blind fury and the highway robber, and ending with the cold-blooded murderer who delighted in the death-struggles of his victim, the professional pickpocket, and the tramp. There were also some curious characters, about whom I used to wonder what crime they possibly could have committed to have been sent here. Yes, every one of my comrades had a strange and weird tale to tell, that weighed on his soul like a nightmare which cannot be shaken off. Generally speaking, they hardly ever alluded to their past life. I have known murderers who always seemed so perfectly happy that it was evident they could not be much troubled by their conscience, while others, on the contrary, always maintained a gloomy silence. Few ever told the history of their lives, and none cared to hear it, as it would have been against prison etiquette to evince the slightest curiosity about other people's affairs. Occasionally, if he had nothing better to do, some one would relate some episode of his past life, while another would listen coolly and impassively. I remember one day hearing a drunken robber tell us how he had enticed a little boy five years old into a barn and murdered him there. The others, who had hitherto laughed at his ribald jests suddenly turned against him and bade him hold his tongue—not that they were filled with horror at his tale, but because he had

spoken about things which it was not the custom to mention there. More than one-half of the men could read and write, and I should like to know if there are many populated places in Russia where one might choose at random two hundred and fifty men, one-half of whom could read and write. I remember once hearing some one infer from the comparatively small number of illiterate convicts that education was the moral ruin of the lower classes. He was wrong. The cause of the terrible depravity of our lower classes must be sought for elsewhere, not in teaching them to read and write.

Each department wore a peculiar garb or uniform. Thus some had jackets one-half of which was grey and the other dark brown, and trousers to match, one leg being grey and the other dark brown; others had grey jackets with dark brown sleeves. I remember that one day, when we were out working, a girl who was selling kalatchi, after staring at me for some time, suddenly burst out laughing, and said, 'Why, they must have been very badly off for stuff when they made your clothes of two different materials.' Our heads were also shaved different ways; some had it shaved lengthways, beginning at the forehead and ending at the back of the head, only half of it being shaved, while others had only the front part of their heads shaved from ear to ear.

Even the most superficial and indifferent observer could not have helped noticing that there were certain peculiar traits of character common to all the members of this strange family. They were,

with few exceptions, a surly, envious, swaggering set, easily offended, and terribly punctilious in their observation of certain rules which constituted what may be called prison etiquette. One of these rules was, never to be taken by surprise by anything, and never to appear astonished; another, always to maintain a solemn, even sullen, behaviour. The few light-hearted fellows, who would persist in making the best of everything and cracking jokes with everybody, were universally despised for their lack of sobriety. No man of the world could have been more careful in observing appearances than were these condemned felons. Yes; I have not unfrequently seen the greatest braggarts turn into whining, cringing poltroons, and display an amount of cowardice which contrasted oddly enough with the bravery on which they had prided themselves only a short time before. There were a few really courageous fellows among them, men who, through their superior power of will and their marked individuality, would have been fit to take the lead, yet even they, curiously enough, seemed to shrink into themselves and adapt themselves to the general tone of the prison. The greater part of the convicts were terribly depraved. Constant gossiping, tale-bearing, quarrelling, cynical jesting, and vicious, filthy actions made the place a perfect hell. They all felt it and suffered under it, yet nobody had the moral courage to stand up and try and reform his fellow-prisoners. Even the most desperate criminals, who been the terror of whole districts, and who had come to us expecting to astonish their comrades by the recital of their

ferocious deeds, soon subsided into silence as they became aware that they had come to the wrong place if they had thought to become objects of admiration.

I have never met with any signs of shame and contrition on the part of a convict prisoner; on the contrary, they seemed actually to pride themselves on being convicts and sentenced to penal servitude, as if the very name of convict were an honourable appellation conferred only upon a chosen few. Occasionally they would indulge in a few humorous remarks concerning their own position, as, for instance, 'We are lost people; we would not walk straight when we were free, now we must run along the green street;'[1] 'We would not obey our father and mother, now we must follow the drum;' 'We would not sew with threads of gold, now we must break stones by the road,' etc. But, as I have said before, all these were moral sentences formed expressly for the edification of their hearers and for their amusement, while in the bottom of their hearts they considered themselves the unfortunate victims of a cruel and relentless fate. They were all adepts in the arts of quarrelling and using foul language, especially in the latter. Every word, every expression seemed to have been weighed carefully and pondered over, that it might cut the deeper and hurt the more. 'The devil wore out three wooden shoes before he brought us together' was a common saying among them. The more energetic and manly natures, who all their life had been accustomed to rule over others by the power of their

[1] I.e. run the gauntlet.

iron will, and whom the others could not help respecting, kept rather aloof from the rest, seldom quarrelled, as it would have been *infra dig.* to demean themselves to such a point, and were almost invariably obedient to their superiors, not from moral principle or any sense of duty, but from a kind of tacit compromise between both parties, that if they behaved well it was for their own benefit. As a rule the officers were rather careful in their treatment of them. I cannot help mentioning here one instance which will serve to illustrate and confirm what I have been saying. There was among the convicts a man with terrible animal passions who could become positively dangerous when infuriated. One fine summer day, during the time allotted us for recreation, he was led out to be flogged for some offence. The officer who was in immediate charge of the prison had come to the guard-room, which was at the gates of the prison, to superintend the execution of the sentence in person. This major was held in abomination by the convicts, who trembled at the very sight of him. He was unbearably strict, and 'pounced upon people,' as the men used to say. Most of all they feared his searching lynx eyes, which seemed to see what was going on at the other end of the prison before he had fairly got in at one end. He had been nicknamed 'Eight-eyes.' He made a great mistake in treating us as he did, as by his imprudent and cruel behaviour he only embittered and irritated men who were already almost too much so. If it had not been for the head Governor, or Commandant, of the Prison, as he was called, he might have done

us a great deal of harm, but the latter happily interposed sometimes between his victims and himself. As it was, I often wonder that not more attempts were made to murder him. He tyrannised over us for a good many years, and finally left the service. It is true that he was brought up before a court-martial subsequently, but that could not take away our past sufferings and make them undone.

The convict turned pale when he was summoned to the guard-room. As a rule he had always submitted to his punishment without saying a word or uttering a scream, and got up after it and walked quietly away as if he had never so much as felt one blow; but this time he thought himself in the right, and had made up his mind not to submit to what he considered an injustice. As I have said before, he turned pale, and managed to slip a sharp English shoe-knife into his sleeve. It was strictly prohibited to have knives and other cutting instruments in the prison; searches were frequently instituted for them, and the prisoner who was found to be in unlawful possession of a knife or any other instrument was severely punished, and his instruments were confiscated. But as no trade or handicraft can be carried on without a knife, those who had lost them took good care to provide themselves with others at the first opportunity. All the convicts rushed up to the fence and looked anxiously through the chinks, as it was well known that Petroff had made up his mind not to submit this time, and to kill the major. But, fortunately for himself, at the last moment our major got into his droshki and drove away, having

asked another officer to superintend the flogging. 'God has saved his life,' said the convicts. Petroff at once renounced all ideas of murder, and lay down to be flogged. The convict prisoner is obedient and submissive only to a certain point, which it is dangerous to overstep. The man who has suffered in silence and patience for many a year suddenly revolts and breaks out like a madman. I have already said that never in the course of all the years I spent with them have I seen the convicts show the slightest sign of shame or repentance. I suppose that this apparent hardness of heart is in great deal caused by false shame and bad example. On the other side, who can say that he has seen into the inmost depths of those hearts and read there what is hidden from all the world? It might, perhaps, seem hardly probable that in all those years I should not have met with one instance at least of moral suffering caused by the memory of some crime. Yet I repeat that I never did. The philosophy of crime is more difficult than is commonly supposed, and it is impossible to define crime according to certain given points of view. Neither imprisonment nor the hard-labour system will ever make the prisoner a better man or a more useful member of society; while they are the means of punishing him and protecting society against his violence, they only develop in him a feeling of intense hatred, a thirst for forbidden pleasures, and an almost incredible recklessness. I am also persuaded that the solitary imprisonment system, in spite of all that has been said in its favour, entirely fails to

fulfil its object. It takes all the strength out of a man, enervates and weakens him morally, and terrifies him into becoming what is commonly called a model of repentance, but what in reality is no more like true repentance than a mummy is like a living, breathing human being.

I have frequently heard convicts relate the most terrible crimes, the most unnatural deeds, laughing heartily at their recollection of them. I remember particularly one young nobleman who had murdered his father. He had served in some Government office, led a wild, reckless life, and run into debt. His old father tried to put a stop to his extravagance, but he had some fortune and a small estate; and his son murdered him in order to get at his father's money. The murderer had the impudence to inform the police of his father's mysterious disappearance, and lived even more riotously than before. The body was discovered at last in a covered drain in the courtyard; it was dressed, the grey-haired head had been severed from the trunk, and placed on a pillow close to it. The murderer pleaded not guilty, but evidences were too strongly against him, and he was disennobled and sentenced to penal servitude for twenty years. When I knew him, he was a frivolous, reckless young man, rather clever, and always in excellent spirits. The other prisoners despised him, not for his crime, for that had long been forgotten, but for his frivolous behaviour and lack of dignity. He used occasionally to mention his father in the course of conversation, and I remember hearing him say once, when he was telling

me of the vigorous constitution hereditary in his family: 'Take my father, for instance now, he never had a day's ill-health up to the very moment of his death.' I never did believe him to be guilty, although persons who had lived in the same town with him, and were acquainted with all the particulars of his story, assured me that it was true. The convicts once heard him crying out in his sleep: 'Hold him fast! Cut off his head; cut off his head!'

Almost all the men talked in their sleep, generally about knives or other cutting instruments, and occasionally they swore and used bad language. 'We have been so much beaten,' they used to say by way of explanation, 'that our bowels are loose in our bellies, and that makes us cry out in our sleep.'

No convict ever looks upon hard labour as an occupation. To him it is merely the hateful task which must be done, and as soon as he has finished it, or worked the stated number of hours, he goes back to the prison, where he devotes most of his spare time to some more profitable occupation than working for the Government. No man can exist without work, and the convict prisoner least of all. There is an old proverb about Satan finding work for idle hands which perhaps might be applied to no place with more truth than to a prison, the inhabitants of which are in great part men still in their prime, full of life and vigour, who must find an outlet for their pent-up energies. If occupation of a more engrossing character than their daily task is denied them, what other outlet remains but vice of the

lowest kind? This the convicts know, and instinctively they apply themselves to the exercise of some trade or handicraft which alone can save them from sinking lower and lower. During the long summer days there was but little time left for private employment, as we worked for the Government all day long, and could hardly get sleep enough during the short night. But in winter time, when the convicts were locked up in the prison at dusk, with the long dreary winter evening before them, the prison seemed to be transformed as if by magic into a large work-room in spite of the prohibition. That is, we were not forbidden to work, but we were strictly forbidden to have any tools or instruments of any kind, without which it is impossible to work. Naturally enough, the convicts worked in secret, and I am rather inclined to think that the officers knew about it, but pretended not to see it. I have known many a criminal come into the prison without knowing any trade, and become a first-rate workman before he left it. There were among us boot- and shoe-makers, tailors, joiners, locksmiths, woodcarvers, gilders, etc. A Jew, Issaï Boumstein, was a jeweller and pawnbroker. There was no lack of customers in the town, and the men worked hard, and their earnings were often considerable. The great difficulty was to keep the latter, as we were forbidden to have money, and the Major frequently appeared in the prison at night-time to search for hidden treasures. In spite of all the precautions of the unfortunate owner, his poor little hoard was generally discovered and confiscated, and he was severely flogged for daring to disobey the regu-

lations of the prison. Is it to be wondered at that the men preferred to spend their earnings in drink to seeing them fall into the hands of their tyrant? Yet, after each nocturnal visitation, new instruments were bought, and everything went on as before. The officers knew this, and never interfered till the next visitation, and the convicts never even thought of murmuring at their hard lot, although their life was very much like that of people who live on a volcano.

Those convicts who knew no trade tried, nevertheless, to earn a few copecks occasionally in different ways. Some bought and sold things which nobody but a prisoner would ever have thought of selling or buying, or even of calling things. But the convicts were poor and very practical, and could turn even a filthy rag to some account. Others were pawnbrokers. A convict who had either lost or spent all his money invariably pawned his things, and not only his own personal property, but articles of clothing, instruments, etc., which were either only his for the time being, as they formed part of his prisoner's garb which was given him by the Government, or else might be needed at any time. The pawnbroker let him have a trifling sum for his goods at a terribly high interest. If the poor wretch was unable to redeem his pledge at a given time, the things were sold without further ado. Not unfrequently, however, the affair does not terminate quite so favourably for the pawnbroker; sometimes the convict would, on receiving his money, report the whole transaction to the sergeant-at-arms, who at once would order the pawnbroker to return the

things, which was done without demur. The pawnbroker returned the pledge in sullen silence, and occasionally gave vent to his feelings in a few emphatic wishes concerning the future welfare of his customer, but as a rule he always acted on such occasions as if he had expected things to turn out that way, and knew that he might even have done the same thing if he had been in the other man's place.

They were all terrible thieves. We were allowed to have boxes with a lock and key to keep our things in, but this did not prevent the men from helping themselves to their fellow-prisoners' property. I remember how one of the convicts who was sincerely attached to me stole my Bible, the only book we were allowed to have in the prison. He confessed his theft to me that very day, not from any feeling of remorse, but because he saw that I was looking for it everywhere, and felt sorry for me. Several men sold spirits in the prison, and made quite a fortune by their trade. I shall speak more of the liquor trade hereafter, as it is rather an interesting subject. We also had a good many smugglers in the prison, who kept themselves in practice by smuggling the liquor.

I must not omit to make mention of the numerous charitable gifts which were continually sent to the prison. I do not think that the higher classes of our society have the slightest idea of the deep interest which the tradespeople and lower classes take in the 'unfortunates.' The gifts consisted for the greater part in bread of all kinds, money being seldom given. This in some places is a welcome

boon to the convicts, especially the prisoners who are awaiting their trial, and are frequently half-starved. Each batch of bread is equally divided among the prisoners. I have even seen them cut a kalâtch[1] into six parts, so that each man might have at least one mouthful. I shall never forget the first time that I ever had a trifle given me as if I were a beggar. It happened soon after my arrival in the prison. I was coming home after my morning's work, with my escort, and met a woman and her daughter, a lovely little girl of ten years old. I had already seen them once before. The mother was a soldier's widow; her husband, a young soldier, had been brought up before the court-martial—I do not know for what offence—and had died in the prisoner's ward in the hospital at the time when I was lying there ill. His wife and daughter had come to say good-bye to him, weeping bitterly. When the little girl saw me she blushed, and whispered something into her mother's ear, who stopped, and after looking for some time in her bundle, finally drew forth a quarter of a copeck,[2] and gave it to the girl, who ran after me. 'Here, poor man, take this little copeck for Christ's sake!' cried she, and put the coin into my hand. I took it, and she ran back to her mother, looking very happy I have long kept that poor little copeck among my treasures.

[1] A kind of roll made of wheaten flour and water.

[2] A coin which is a little more in value than a farthing.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS (*continued*).

How well I remember the first month of my life in the convict prison. It seems deeply engraved on my mind, while the long years that come after have left behind them a dull, monotonous, and gloomy impression. I feel as if all the incidents that happened during the first days of my captivity had taken place only yesterday. Ought it not to be so?

I distinctly remember being very much struck at first to find that my new life was after all not so very different from my old one. I seemed to have known all about it beforehand. When on my way to Siberia I had tried to guess what my life would be like. It was not till I had spent some time in the convict prison that I fully realised what an exceptional and unnatural existence I was to lead henceforth, and I could never make up my mind to bear it patiently. My first impression on entering the prison was a feeling of intense loathing; yet, strange to say, the life of a convict seemed to me less hard than I had pictured it to myself on the road. The convicts were in chains, but still they were free to go about in the prison, to smoke, to swear at each other, sing

whatever songs they liked, a few even drank brandy, and some had regular card parties every night. Neither did the work in itself appear to me very difficult, and it was not till later on that I began to realise that it was rendered irksome and almost unbearable through being imposed as a task which had to be finished by a certain time for fear of punishment. Many a poor labourer who is free works perhaps harder than a convict, and even spends sometimes a part of the night working out of doors, especially in the summer-time. But he works for himself only, and this thought, and the knowledge that he will profit by his labour, is enough to reward him, while the convict is obliged to work at something which can never be of the slightest use to him. I have sometimes thought that the way to crush and annihilate a human being completely would be to set him to do a completely senseless and useless thing. Now, although the work executed by the convict is unprofitable and tedious so far as he himself is concerned, it is far from being aimless in itself. He makes bricks, works in the fields, builds houses, etc. Sometimes he even gets interested in his work, and tries to do it better and quicker than his fellow-workmen. But if he were condemned to pour water from one tub into another, and then back again, or to pound sand in a mortar, or to carry a heap of earth backwards and forwards, I am convinced that he would either commit suicide within a few days or murder some of his fellow-sufferers in order to suffer death at once and be delivered from this moral torture, shame, and degradation.

I arrived at the prison in December, and consequently knew nothing yet about the work in summer-time, which is much harder than in winter. During the cold season the convicts occasionally were sent down to the Irtysch to break up old barges that belonged to the Government; others were employed in the various workshops or in shovelling away the snow which had accumulated round the houses after a snow-storm. Some ground and burned alabaster. But, as the days are short in winter, the daily task was soon done, and the convicts returned early to their prison, where they spent the rest of the day in idleness, unless they happened to have something to do for themselves. Only one-third of the convicts, however, were fortunate enough to have some little private employment or know some trade; the rest hung about listlessly, or wandered from cell to cell, quarrelling, gossiping, getting drunk if they happened to have any money, and at night gambling away their last shirt.

As the time wore on I began to realise that in prison life there is something harder to bear than the loss of freedom or hard labour in fetters, and that is the impossibility of being alone even for one moment. I am quite sure that every convict felt this, and chafed under it, though perhaps he was not conscious of the cause of his restlessness and suffering.

Our food was not bad, and the convicts used to say that it was superior in quality to the food in the convict prisons in European Russia, but, not having been there, I am unable to judge. We were allowed to provide our own food if we chose—that is, if we

had money enough. Meat was very cheap, but only those who had a private income indulged in the luxury of finding their own dinners, the greater part of the convicts preferring the prison diet. The bread was very good, and in great demand in the town, but the shtshi[1] was rather poor and thin, as it was made in a large vessel with a very scanty addition of groats. I used at first to be horrified at the numbers of black-beetles floating about in it, but my fellow-prisoners evidently thought that they imparted an additional flavour to the soup, and never took any notice of them.

During the first three days I did not go out to work with the others, as it is the custom to allow every new-comer to rest after his journey. On the second day I went to the blacksmith's shop to have my old fetters taken off and new ones put on instead, as those which I had worn hitherto were not made according to regulations, and consisted of rings. The convicts had nicknamed them 'small chimes.' They were worn over the clothes. My new chains, which were better adapted for working in them, consisted of four iron rods, as big as a finger each, and connected by means of three rings. They were worn under the trousers. A leather strap was fastened with one end to the middle ring, and with the other to the strap that served as belt, and was worn over the shirt.

How well I remember every incident of my first morning in the prison. The *réveil* was sounded in the barracks by the prison gate, and ten minutes

[1] Soup made of pickled cabbage.

later the sergeant-at-arms on duty unlocked the door. A wretched, spluttering tallow candle had been lighted in our cell, and by its light the convicts could be seen rising from their pallets, shivering with the cold, yawning, stretching themselves. Hardly any words were exchanged—they felt much too cross and miserable to talk. A few crossed themselves, others had already begun to quarrel. The room was terribly close, and it was quite a relief to have the fresh winter air stream in through the open doors. The convicts crowded round the water-tubs; each in his turn plunged a tin drinking-cup with a long handle into the water, then raising it to his mouth, took a deep draught, and squirting the water into the hollow of his hands, washed his face and hands in this primitive fashion. The water had been brought in the night before by a convict who had been chosen by the *artél* to do the house-work in the cells—keep the floor and pallets clean, fill our washing-tub at night for washing, and in the morning with water for drinking during the day. He never went out to work, and was nicknamed 'housemaid.' A violent quarrel had arisen between two convicts about the cup, which they both claimed at the same time.

'Where are you going?' growled a thin, surly-looking convict, with a dark face and queer bumps all over his close-cropped head, pushing away another man who was short and stout, and had a red, good-humoured face. 'Stop there, will you?'

'What are you yelling at me for? Do you think that I get paid for waiting? Just look at him, does he not stand there like a monument? You must

excuse him, my little brothers, he has no mannerification, poor fellow!'

'Mannerification' produced some effect, and was received with a shout of laughter, to the gratification of the stout convict, who was evidently the buffoon of the party. The tall convict merely cast a disdainful glance at him.

'The old cow,' growled he under his breath, 'has grown fat on prison food. I expect it is looking forward to having a litter of pigs next Christmas.'

'I should like to know what kind of bird [1] you call yourself?' screamed his opponent, growing very red in the face.

''Tis none of your business.'

'Yes it is. I want to know what kind of bird you call yourself?'

'I tell you that I shan't tell you.'

'What kind of bird?'

'Never you mind.'

'What kind of bird?'

There they stood staring hard at each other. The fat man was evidently expecting an answer, and stood with his fists clenched, prepared to fight his antagonist then and there. I fully believed that they were going to have it out, and watched them with a certain interest, as all this was quite new to me. But I soon learnt that such scenes generally ended quite peaceably, being, as it were, merely acted for the edification of the bystanders. A real fight was quite an exceptional thing, and this fact is

[1] An expression corresponding to the English slang phrase, 'Who are you?'

rather characteristic of the general tone of the prison.

The tall prisoner had remained immovable, calmly and majestically surveying us. He knew that the eyes of the whole party were fixed upon him, and that he was expected to give an answer. He was fully aware that his reputation would suffer unless he could prove satisfactorily that he was a bird, and to what species he belonged. He kept his eyes fixed on his antagonist with a look of ineffable contempt; and, as if wishing to aggravate him still more, he scanned him minutely from head to foot as if he were examining a microscopic beetle. At last he said slowly and distinctly: 'A gaolbird.'

A loud shout of laughter greeted this ingenious retort.

'You are a d——d brute and no gaolbird,' roared the fat man in a violent passion, having been beaten on all points.

The quarrel threatened to become serious, and the spectators hastened to interpose and separate the enraged antagonists.

'What are you cackling here for like a couple of old hens?' shouted one.

'Why don't you fight instead of squabbling?' remarked another from his corner.

'They fight, indeed!' added a third; 'you never saw such a brave lot in all your born days. Why, seven of us are not afraid to meet one man——'

'Oh, but they are plucky enough,' said a fourth. 'Don't you know that one of them has come here for stealing a loaf of bread—and the other has been

flogged for drinking out of an old woman's pot of milk!'

'Silence there!' roared the invalided soldier who lived in the barracks ostensibly for the purpose of maintaining order and quiet, and had the privilege of sleeping on a pallet bed of his own in a corner of the cell.

'Hallo, brothers, hand the water over here. Nevalid Petrovitch is getting up. Our dear little brother Nevalid Petrovitch must have a little water to wash himself.'

'Brother, indeed! d—— your impudence,' growled the old soldier, slowly drawing on his coat. 'I wonder you have the face to call me brother, when you have never treated me to a rouble's worth of brandy yet.'

The day began to dawn, and the roll was called. The kitchens were crowded with convicts in their short fur coats and two-coloured caps, who came to fetch the huge slices of bread which one of the cooks was cutting for them. Two cooks had been appointed by the *artél* for each kitchen, and to their trust the knives for cutting bread and meat had been committed. Every corner and table in the kitchen was presently occupied by convicts fully equipped for going out to work. Some had wooden bowls filled with kvas[1] standing before them, in which they steeped their bread before eating it. The noise and shouting were almost unbearable, but two or three men sat talking quietly in a corner.

[1] A fermented drink made of rye.

'Bread and salt,[1] old Antonych, and good-morning to you,' said a young convict, sitting down beside a toothless and very surly-looking old gentleman.

'Morning,' growled the other, without looking up, and pegging away at a piece of bread.

'Do you know, Antonych, I had really begun to think that you had departed this life.'

'You had better die first then.'

I sat down beside them. On the other side of me a serious conversation was being carried on by two grave-looking convicts, who were evidently trying to appear very dignified.

'I'm not afraid of being robbed,' said one; 'I tell you what, brother, I am afraid of being tempted to steal myself.'

'Ah, those who think they can get round me had better think twice before they try.'

'Do you think that they will fear you? You are a simpleton, just like the rest of them. Why, she will come and wheedle every farthing out of your pocket, and never even say thank-you. That's how I got rid of my money, brother. She came here the other day, and what could I do with her? So I asked leave to go and see Fed'ka the hangman—the same who had a house in the suburbs which he bought of scurvy Solomon the Jew, who afterwards hanged himself.'

'Yes, I know. He used to sell brandy here three years ago, and we called him Grishka, the black pothouse. I know him.'

[1] An expression corresponding to the *bon appétit* of the French.

'No, no; you are quite wrong there. I mean another black pothouse.'

'You are wrong, and not I. Don't you think you know everything now? I shall prove to you that I am right.'

'Will you, indeed! And who are you, pray, and who am I?'

'I'll tell you presently who you are. Haven't I licked you many a time, and never even mentioned it; and here you dare to come and ask who you are.'

'You licked me, indeed! Why, the man who can lick me has yet to be born, and he who has licked me is in his grave.'

'You d——d plague of Bender!'

'May the Siberian plague fall on you!'

'If only a Turk would speak to you with his sword!'

And so on, and so forth.

'What, fighting again?' shouted the others. 'When you were free you had no peace till you came here, and now you are only too glad to have a bellyful of food.'

The combatants were silenced at once. Quarrelling—beating with the tongue, as it is termed—is generally tolerated, as it affords the audience rather a pleasant diversion. But a fight is allowed only under exceptional circumstances; for, ten to one, the Major, as the Governor of our prison was called, is sure to hear of it and to investigate the matter closely. The combatants themselves frequently start a quarrel merely for the purpose of practising elocu-

tion. Sometimes they will begin apparently in a rage, and you expect every moment to see them throttling each other, but after reaching a certain point they suddenly cool down, and separate on the best of terms. The specimens of talk which I have quoted here are taken at random from the conversations that were carried on daily. It took me some time to understand how people could possibly quarrel for the sake of amusement, till it became evident to me that vanity was one of the principal motives, as the party who quarrelled according to all the rules of rhetoric was highly applauded by the audience.

Both on the day of my arrival and on the next I had noticed that many unfriendly glances were directed towards me. Other convicts, on the contrary, who evidently supposed that I had got some money, hung about me trying to ingratiate themselves. They taught me how to wear my fetters, got me a box with a key (which I paid for) where I was to keep my underclothing and a few other things I had brought with me. I am sorry to have to add that on the very next day my new friends stole the box and sold it for drink. One of them grew subsequently much attached to me, though he never could resist the temptation of robbing me whenever the opportunity presented itself. Curiously enough, he did it without any feeling of compunction, and almost mechanically, as if he were impelled to do it by a certain sense of duty. I could never be angry with him for stealing my belongings.

I was also told that I must find my own tea and buy a teapot. Meanwhile one of my informants

lent me his, and recommended to me a cook who would prepare my dinner for thirty copecks a month if I preferred to find myself. It is needless to add that they at once borrowed money from me, and even repeated this small transaction several times in the course of the first day.

As a rule, convicts who are of gentle birth have a great deal to suffer in the prison. They are disliked by their fellow-convicts, who refuse to acknowledge themselves as their equals, though they have lost all the privileges of their former rank and position. It afforded them unspeakable delight to sneer at us for our disgrace, and to witness our sufferings which we were trying to hide from them. Their hatred and contempt manifested themselves especially when we were out working together, because we were not as strong as they, and could not help them as much as they expected.

There were several gentlemen in the convict prison, five of them were Poles—I shall speak more of them hereafter. The other convicts hated the Poles even more than they hated us. The latter (I speak only of the political criminals) treated them with the utmost politeness, though at the same time they kept aloof from them, and took no pains to disguise their loathing. This the convicts knew, and made them pay dearly for it.

It was not till after I had lived nearly two years in the prison that some of the convicts began to treat me with something like cordiality. Subsequently the greater number of them grew to like me, and I was acknowledged to be a 'good' man.

There were four Russian gentlemen beside myself in the prison. One of these was a miserable depraved wretch. I had been warned not to grow too intimate with him before I met him, and I accordingly repelled all his advances. Another was the parricide whom I have mentioned before in my memoirs. The third was Akím Akímytch, the greatest original I have ever come across. I seem to see him now before me—a tall, gaunt man, of very limited intellectual capacities, hardly able to read and write, passionately fond of arguing, and as punctilious and pedantic as a German. The convicts used to laugh at him good-humouredly, though some of them rather feared him on account of his quarrelsome disposition. He had from the first become intimate with them, his intimacy extending even to fighting and quarrelling with his friends. He was remarkably honest, and could never stand by quietly and see an injustice committed without immediately taking the matter up, even if it was none of his business. He often lectured the convicts on the immorality of stealing. We became friends from the first day we met, and he told me his history at once. He had long served in the Caucasus, had finally risen to the rank of captain, and had been made governor of some small fortress. One fine night a neighbouring Caucasian prince attacked his fortress and burnt it down, but was defeated and driven back. Akím Akímytch pretended not to know who the culprit was, and the attack was ascribed to some unruly tribe in the neighbourhood. A month elapsed, and Akím Akímytch asked the prince to come and pay him a visit. He

came, without suspecting any evil. Akím Akímytch marched out his troops, and in their presence accused and convicted him of his crime, told him that it was exceedingly wrong to burn down fortresses, and, after giving him minute directions as to what the behaviour of a peaceful prince ought to be, shot him dead on the spot, and immediately reported the case to his superiors. He was tried and condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to twelve years' hard labour in Siberia. He was quite aware of having acted illegally, and told me that he had known it before he shot the prince. Yet he did not seem to be able to understand clearly wherein he had done wrong, and would say in reply to my remarks, 'But he burned down my fortress. Would you have me thank him for it?'

The convicts laughed at Akím Akímytch for his queer sayings and doings, but they also respected him for his love of order and cleverness.

There seemed to be no handicraft in which he was not proficient. He exercised at once the professions of joiner, boot- and shoe-maker, painter, locksmith, gilder, etc., all which different arts he had acquired during his imprisonment by watching the others at their work. He also made divers baskets, boxes, toys, and paper lanterns, which he sold in the town. His earnings were considerable, and he spent them mostly in buying underclothing or a softer pillow, and invested in a mattress which could be folded up so as to take up little room and be stowed away easily during the daytime. He was my room fellow, and very kind to me during the first days of

my captivity. Before going to their work the prisoners assembled in the courtyard in two rows. Both facing them and behind them soldiers were drawn up with loaded guns. Then the head engineer appeared with his officials and accompanied by the 'conductor,' who told the convicts off in separate groups and sent them to their work. I was sent with several others to an engineer's workshop in a low stone building which stood in the midst of a large yard where materials of all kinds were scattered about. The building contained also a forge, and the joiner's, locksmith's, and painter's workshops. Akím Akímytch was hard at work in the latter preparing his colours and painting chairs and tables.

While waiting for my new chains I entered into conversation with him about my first impressions in the prison.

'You are right,' he said, 'gentlemen are not liked here, especially if they happen to be political criminals. But then, you know, they have reason enough for hating you. In the first place you are altogether different from them, and, in the second place, before coming here they were all either serfs or soldiers, and you must own yourself that they have precious little cause for liking you. And let me tell you that life is by no means easy here. But I have been told that it is even worse in the Russian prisons. There are some here who have come from those prisons, and they cannot say enough in praise of our place. They say it is like coming out of hell and going straight into Paradise. And yet the work there is not very hard. They say that the officers behave differently,

too, and that there is hardly any military discipline in those convict prisons. But then, I understand, that there an exile may live in his own house. I have never been there myself, but they tell me so. The convicts in Russia, you see, are not obliged to shave their heads, and do not wear a uniform; now, for my part, I rather like to see them all shaved and dressed alike. It looks tidier and cleaner, and is pleasing to the eye. Yet the convicts do not like it. Did you ever see such a motley crowd before? One has been a soldier, another is a Tcherkesse, a third a Raskólnik,[1] a fourth an orthodox peasant who has left his family, his dear children, at home, a fifth is a Jew, a sixth a gipsy, a seventh the Lord knows who. And all these different people are expected to live together in peace and harmony—to eat out of the same dish and sleep on the same boards. And then there is no liberty whatever here. If you happen to have a nice little bit of something good to eat, you must swallow it in secret, and if you want to keep a farthing of your own money you must hide it in your boots, and, go where you will, you are always in prison. And how you can expect a man to keep steady under the circumstances is more than I can tell.'

All this was nothing new to me. I wanted to know something about our Governor the Major, and Akím Akímytch was only too glad to talk. What he told me produced a most painful impression upon me. It was my fate to remain for two whole years under his rule, and I soon had an opportunity of

[1] A religious sect in Russia.

verifying the truth of what Akím Akímytch had told me about him. He was a terrible man in the full sense of the word, having almost unlimited power over two hundred prisoners. His temper was very violent; he led a wild life, and looked upon the convicts as so many natural enemies, which was a great mistake. He was by no means without natural capacities, but there was something strange and distorted even about his good qualities. In his fits of passion he would sometimes burst into the prison in the middle of the night, and woe betide the convict who was found sleeping on his left side or his back. He was severely flogged the next day for having disobeyed the Major's orders to sleep on his right side. He was both hated and feared by the convicts; his face was purple, and had a sinister expression. It was well known that his servant Fed'ka ruled over him. He loved his poodle Tresórka above everything, and nearly went out of his mind with grief when the dog fell ill. He cried over him as if he had been his own child, turned a veterinary surgeon out of doors and was with difficulty prevented from kicking him for not being able to cure the poodle; and, having heard from Fed'ka that there was a convict in the prison who had taught himself the veterinary art, and had performed some very successful cures, he sent for the man at once.

'Help me, save Tresórka, and I will give thee gold!' screamed he, when the man entered his room. Now it so happened that the latter was a shrewd Siberian peasant, and really a first-rate veterinary surgeon. I once overheard him relating the story to the other prisoners, a long time afterwards, when the whole thing had been forgotten.

'The dog was lying on the sofa on a white pillow. I examined him, and saw at once that he was ill with inflammation. Says I to myself, if I were to bleed the brute now, he would recover, but, says I again to myself, how, if I should not cure him, and he should die! "No," says I to the Major; "highborn one, you have sent for me too late. If I had seen him the day before yesterday, I might have saved him, but I could not do anything now."' And thus Tresórka departed this life. Once an attempt had been made to murder the Major. The would-be murderer had been a convict for several years, and always noted for his good behaviour. He hardly ever spoke to anyone, and was generally looked upon as a harmless idiot. He could read and write, and had for the last year been constantly reading his Bible day and night. When all were asleep, he used to get up at midnight, light a wax taper which he had bought in the church, climb upon the stove, open his book, and read till morning. One fine day he told the sergeant on duty that he was not going out to work as usual. This was of course reported to the Major, who flew into a violent passion and appeared immediately in the prison. The convict threw a brick at him which he had previously secreted, but missed his aim, was seized, tried, punished, and died on the third day in the hospital. On his death-bed he said that he wished nobody ill, but that he wished to suffer. I never heard that he belonged to any religious sect, and the other convicts always spoke of him with great respect.

They were putting on my new chains when several girls came in selling kalatchi. Some of them w

mere children. Their mothers baked the kalatchi,[1] and they carried them about for sale till they grew up, when they continued to visit the prison, but without the kalatchi. There were one or two full-grown women among them. The kalatchi cost a grosh apiece, and were nearly all bought up by the convicts.

I noticed one of them, a grey-haired joiner, with a blooming face, who flirted desperately with the girls. Shortly before their arrival he had tied a red cotton kerchief round his throat, and began a conversation with a fat woman, marked all over with small-pox, who had placed her basket on his work-table.

'Why did you not come yesterday?' asked he with a self-confident smile.

'That's a good one! I did come, but you were nowhere to be found,' answered she.

'You see, we were called away on business, else we should not have failed to appear.'

'All your friends called on me the day before yesterday.'

'Who ever were they?'

'Maryàshka came, and Khavróshka and Tchekundá, and Twogroshes came.'

'You don't mean to say,' said I to Akím Akímytch, 'that——'

'It does happen,' replied he, bashfully casting down his eyes.

It did happen, but with great difficulties, and not without considerable expense, as it was necessary

[1] A roll made of flour and water.

in such cases to bribe the escort. I remember once witnessing a 'lover's' meeting on the banks of the Irtysh, whither three of us had been sent to repair a lime-kiln. Our escort happened to be good-natured enough to allow the meeting. At last two 'prompters,' as the convicts call them, appeared.

'Where have you been all this time?—at Mr. Wolf's?' said the convict, who had been anxiously expecting them for the last hour.

'Surely I have not been very long in coming. Why, a crow could not fly faster than I have walked,' replied the young lady.

She was the dirtiest female I had ever seen in this world, and the identical Tchekundá. Her companion was Twogroshes, and she was still dirtier.

'It seems quite a long time since I saw you last,' continued the beau, addressing himself to the last-named young person.

'You have grown quite thin.'

'Perhaps so. I used to be fat once, but now I am as thin as if I had swallowed a needle.'

* * * *

I took leave of Akím Akímytch, and, having been told that I might go back to the prison if I liked, I summoned my escort and left the forge. The convicts were already coming in to their dinner. Prisoners who have a task given them always come in before the others. The only way to get a convict to work with zeal is to set him a task. Sometimes these tasks are very difficult, but, notwithstanding, the convict will get through the business in half the time he would take to do it if he were obliged to work

till the drum sounds for dinner. Having once finished his work he is free to go back to the prison and spend the rest of the day as he likes best.

As the kitchen was too small to seat all the convicts at once, they dined separately, each calling for his share as he came in. I tried to swallow some shtshi, but finding them too unpalatable made myself some tea. Another convict, also a gentleman by birth, joined me, and we sat down at one end of the table. The convicts came and went around us; all had not come in yet, and there was room enough left in the kitchen. Five men sat down together at a big table. The cook poured out some shtshi into two wooden bowls, and set them on the table before them, together with a huge platter of fried fish. They were evidently celebrating some festival or other, as they had been ordering their own dinner. They scowled at us. A Pole entered the kitchen and sat down by us.

'I know all that's going on, even when I am away,' shouted a tall convict who had just come into the kitchen and taken everybody in at a glance. The new-comer might be about fifty years old; he was of strong build, tall and spare. There was a curious expression of good-humoured shrewdness in his face, which was rendered irresistibly comical by his thick protruding nether lip. 'I hope you have had a good night's rest. Why don't you say good-morning to me? How do you do, good people of Koursk?' he went on, sitting down beside the men who were eating their own dinner. 'Bread and salt, where are your manners?'

'We are not from Koursk, brother.'

'All right, from Tamboff, then.'

'We are not from Tamboff, either. There is nothing for you here, brother. You had better go to the rich man, and beg there.'

'Well, brothers, my belly feels rather empty to-day. And pray, where does the rich man live?'

'Gásin is rich enough, I should say. Go to him.'

'Gásin is making merry to-day, my brothers, and spending all his money in drink.'

'He had twenty roubles,' said another. 'Ay, ay, there's nothing like selling spirits after all if you want to make money.'

'Well, if you are not going to ask me to dinner, I shall go and eat out of the common dish.'

'Why don't you go and ask the gentry over there to give you some tea?'

'There are no gentry here—they are no better than we are now,' growled another convict, who had hitherto been sitting silently in a corner.

'I should like some tea very much, but I don't care to ask for it; we are not without pride after all,' remarked the thick-lipped convict, looking good-naturedly towards us.

'Come here and have some tea, if you like,' said I to him.

'I think I should like some!' and he came up to the table.

'Pshaw; when he was at home he ate his shtshi with a wooden shoe, and now he's learnt to like tea because his betters like it,' said the surly convict.

'Don't you drink tea here?' I asked, but he vouchsafed me no answer.

'Oh, here are the kalatchi; please let me have some.'

A young convict had come in with a basketful of kalatchi, which he sold in the prison. The woman who baked them let him have one kalatch in every ten which he sold.

'Kalatchi, kalatchi,' shouted he; 'hot kalatchi, kalatchi from Moscow. I should like to eat them all myself, but money is scarce. Look here, boys, I have only one kalatch left. Who will eat it in memory of his mother?' A burst of laughter greeted this last sally, and several men bought kalatchi.

'Oh, my little brothers,' he went on, 'won't Gásin be dead drunk to-day? I wish, though, he had chosen some other time for boozing. Eight-eyes may come down upon us any time to-day.'

'They will keep him out of sight. Is he very drunk?'

'Awfully. Wants to fight everybody, too.'

'He'll catch it, then, sure enough.'

'Who is this man they are talking about?' said I to the Pole who was sitting next to me.

'It is a convict called Gásin, who sells spirits here. As soon as he has made some money, he goes and spends it all in drink. He has a fearful temper, but manages to keep pretty quiet so long as he is sober; when he is drunk his temper gets the better of him, and he becomes positively dangerous, and has to be calmed down.'

'How, pray?'

'Ten or more of them fall on him, and beat him till he is half-dead and unconscious. Then they lay him on a bench and cover him with a coat.'

'But they might kill him.'

'Any other man would be killed, but not he. He is very strong—in fact, the strongest man in the prison. The next morning he gets up as if nothing had happened.'

'Tell me one thing,' said I. 'These people eat their own food and I drink my own tea—why, then, do they look at me as if they grudged me my tea?'

'They do not grudge you your tea,' said the Pole. 'They hate you because you are a gentleman and not like them. Some of them would be only too glad if they could pick a quarrel with you for no other reason than the one I have just stated. You must make up your mind to meet with a great many disagreeable things here. Their life is hard enough, but ours is harder still. It takes a good deal of Stoicism to get accustomed to it. This is neither the first nor the last time that you will have been sneered at and insulted for buying your own food and tea, yet many of them do the same thing frequently, and some of them are always drinking tea. They have a right to do it, which you have not.'

So saying, he rose and walked away from the table. In a few moments I had the opportunity of realising the truth of his words.

CHAPTER III.

MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS (*continued*).

HARDLY had M——, the Pole with whom I had been having the above conversation, left me, when Gásin burst into the kitchen. The sight of a drunken convict in broad daylight, and on a week-day, too, when everyone was expected to be at his work, in a prison which was noted for the strictness of its discipline, where the Governor might come in any time, where a subaltern officer watched over us day and night, and never left the prison even for an hour, where we were surrounded by an army of sentinels and warders —in a word, where every possible precaution had been taken against our committing even the slightest breach of discipline, entirely upset all my preconceived notions about a convict prison.

I have already mentioned that the greater part of the convicts knew some profession or trade, which they exercised during the hours when they were not working for the Government, and not unfrequently earned considerable sums. Love of money is one of the characteristic traits of the convict prisoner. He prizes money beyond everything next to liberty, and is never happier than when he can rattle it in his

pocket. Without it he grows sad, restless, low-spirited, and will even do something desperate—rob his comrades, or do something worse—rather than be penniless. Yet, although money was such a valuable and much-valued object in the convict prison, it was a difficult one to keep. If the Major in one of his frequent visits to the prison happened to discover that one of the prisoners had a little hoard he immediately confiscated it. Perhaps he spent it on the improvement of our dietary. Anyhow, the luckless owner never beheld his savings again. What escaped the lynx eyes of this official was almost sure to be stolen by some other convict. At last, however, the men were fortunate enough to discover, in the person of an old man who belonged to one of the numerous sects of the Greek Church, an individual whom they might safely trust with their savings. I cannot help saying here a few words about this old man, although he will have nothing to do with my story.

He may have been about sixty years old when I knew him first—a little, shrivelled old man, with grey hairs and a grey beard. I was struck by his manner, which contrasted favourably with that of his comrades, and by the wonderfully quiet and peaceful look in his clear blue eyes. We have had many a long talk together, and I must confess that I have seldom in the course of my life met with such a thoroughly benevolent old man as this old Dissenter was. He had been exiled to Siberia for a very serious crime. His native village had been a special stronghold of the sect to which he belonged, and was

inhabited chiefly by Dissenters. Of late years several of them had joined the Greek Church. The Government was naturally anxious to encourage them in every possible way, and great efforts were made to bring as many converts back into the bosom of the Church as possible. My old friend, together with several others who thought like him, resolved to 'suffer for their faith,' as they called it. An orthodox church had just been built in the village, which they burnt down. The old man was arrested as one of the ringleaders, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude. He had been a wealthy tradesman, and left a wife and children at home, but he left them without a murmur and went into exile, proud of having been deemed worthy to suffer for his faith.

It was constant cause of wonder to me how this quiet, childlike old man could ever have been guilty of incendiarism, sacrilege, and open rebellion against the Government. I tried repeatedly to talk with him about his 'faith.' He always defended his religious opinions warmly, but without the least trace of bitterness or hatred, and looked upon his crime as a glorious deed, and the sufferings it had brought upon him as a martyrdom for which he would assuredly be rewarded sooner or later. There were many other Dissenters among us, mostly Siberian peasants, a sharp, clever set, who knew their sacred books by heart, and were always ready to enter upon a controversy about them. They were not liked in the prison, on account of their cantankerous disposition and the supercilious manner in which they treated the other convicts. My old friend differed from them

almost in every point. I suppose that he knew their sacred books as well as they did, and perhaps even better; but he always avoided religious controversy, and was as pleasant, cheerful, and open-hearted a man as ever lived on the face of this earth. He often laughed, not the coarse, cynical horse-laugh in which the convicts were wont to express their merriment, but a low, sweet, musical laugh, which might have been that of an innocent child, and suited his grey hairs admirably. Perhaps I am mistaken when I say that we may know a person's disposition from their laugh. I have often noticed that a good man has a pleasant laugh, and *vice versâ*. The old man was much respected by the convicts, who called him 'grandfather,' and carefully avoided anything that might have hurt his feelings. Notwithstanding his outward appearance of calmness, and even cheerfulness, there was in his heart a deep well of suffering which he tried to conceal from us all, and which I discovered by mere chance. He lived in the same cell with me, and one night, it may have been about 3 A.M., I woke up suddenly and heard a sound as of subdued weeping. I looked around me. The old Dissenter was sitting on the stove reading his prayers out of a manuscript book and weeping bitterly. I could distinguish words of bitter sorrow between the sobs, such as, 'Lord, do not forsake me! Lord, give me more strength! Oh, my darling children, my dearest children, shall I ever see you again!' Now, this old man had gradually been entrusted with the earnings of nearly all the convicts. They were all thieves, every one of them; but it was universally believed that he

could not steal. He was known to hide the money in a secret place, which nobody had as yet succeeded in discovering. As we became more intimate, he one day showed his hiding-place to me and another convict, a Pole. It was a curious enough contrivance. The planks that formed the fence which inclosed the prison yard were rough-hewn, and from one of them the knobby end of a branch protruded. To a superficial observer it might have appeared firmly connected with the plank, so that it could not be moved, but the old man had accidentally discovered one day that this knob could be taken out, leaving a hollow place in the wood. In this original cash-box our grandfather was in the habit of hiding the money and carefully replacing the knob, so that nobody ever suspected the existence of such a capital hiding-place.

But I have strayed too far from my tale. I was going to try and explain why the convicts' money seemed to burn holes in their pockets. Besides the difficulty of keeping it from being stolen, another reason is the peculiar social position of the convict. He longs intensely for freedom, and must go on living from year to year, sometimes without seeing the least chance of ever being able to satisfy this craving, or at least not for a long time. Is it, therefore, to be wondered at that at times he is unable to resist the temptation to drown his grief for a few hours at least in pleasure? I have seen many a convict work hard for months together till he had earned a considerable sum—then spend every farthing of it in drink in one single day; go back to his work

the next, and toil away for months again till he had enough for another feast. Others, who were fond of dress, spent their earnings on black trousers and coats, print shirts, and leather belts with brass buckles. The convicts always dressed on holidays, and those who were especially proud of their fine clothes never failed to pay a visit to the other cells to show themselves to the world. They were perfectly childish in their love for finery, as well as in many other things. I am sorry to say, however, that all those fine things generally disappeared in the course of the day; they were either stolen, or pawned, or sold for a mere trifle. The great drinking bouts took place generally on a feast-day, or on some convict's name-day; the latter festival was celebrated after the following manner. After rising in the morning as usual, the convict stuck a taper into the little candlestick which hung before the image of his patron saint, and said his prayers, then dressed himself in his best and proceeded to the important business of ordering his dinner. Meat and fish were bought, cakes made, and the convict stuffed himself to the utmost capacity of his stomach. He rarely invited a comrade to partake of his good cheer, but ate alone, voraciously, like a wild beast. Dinner over, brandy was set on the table, of which he partook freely, and then paraded about the prison, staggering and reeling, and stumbling over the benches and other articles of furniture that happened by accident to be in the way to show that he was drunk and enjoying himself—'having a good time,' in short; for which quality, i.e. the being drunk, the others

respected him very much. The Russians in general have always much sympathy with drunken people, but a prisoner who is drunk is quite a hero in his sphere. Towards nightfall the prisoner even hired a musician, to show that money was no object. There lived in the prison a Pole who had deserted from his regiment. He played the fiddle tolerably well, and was never seen without his instrument, which constituted all his worldly possessions; he knew no other profession, and earned occasionally small sums by playing merry tunes to any drunken man who chose to hire his services. His duty on such occasions consisted in following his patron wherever he went, fiddling with all his might and main. He often looked weary enough, poor fellow, but the pitiless cry, 'Go on, you have been paid for playing,' urged him on to new exertions.

The convict who had made up his mind to get drunk on some special day might be sure that, if he should succeed in getting outrageously so, he would be put to bed by his comrades, and carefully kept out of the Major's way; and all this was done as a matter of course, without his having previously asked them to do it, or even thanking them for the trouble they had taken with him.

The sergeant-at-arms and the invalided soldiers who lived in the prison winked at these revels, knowing from experience that the drunken man would be kept quiet and not allowed to create any disturbance in the prison, and besides, if they had prohibited them, worse things might happen. But where did the liquor come from?

It was bought in the prison from the 'tapsters.' There were several of them, and they had a very flourishing trade in spite of the comparative scarcity of customers. Their mercantile operations were carried on in rather an original way. The 'tapster' himself is as a rule a convict prisoner who knows no particular trade, but is possessed with a great desire to grow rich in a short time, and has perhaps a small sum of money at his disposal. This he resolves to invest in liquor, deliberately closing his eyes to the considerable risk which he runs, not only of being severely flogged if he is found out, but also of losing both his merchandise and his capital. As he is not rich enough to hire a smuggler to work for him, he smuggles the liquor himself, and sells it at a great profit. This experiment is repeated two or three times, and if he has succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the warders, his capital increases rapidly; he is able to extend his operations, and to have agents and helpers who run all the risk while he has the profit.

Among the convicts there are always many who have squandered every farthing, and are left without any resources—miserable, wretched, ragged beings, who, however, possess still a certain amount of courage and enterprise. The only thing that they can claim as their own is their back, and they resolve to speculate with it. Such a scapegrace goes to the tapster and applies for a place as smuggler. A rich tapster has always several smugglers under him, and a partner somewhere in the neighbourhood of the prison. This partner is either a soldier or a

small tradesman, sometimes a woman. He is intrusted with a certain sum to buy liquor with, and is besides allowed a considerable percentage on what is sold. The brandy is generally bought in some obscure tavern, and hidden in a secret spot near the place where the convicts work. The partner almost invariably tastes the liquor first before he delivers it to the smuggler, and unmercifully dilutes the rest with water, knowing that the convicts are not very particular as to the quality of their liquor provided the quantity they get in exchange for their money is not too small. When everything has been so far arranged the tapster directs some of his smugglers to wait upon his partner and to bring back as much liquor as they can conveniently carry. As bottles or vessels of any kind would attract the attention of the guards, and be besides rather inconvenient articles to carry, the smugglers have hit on the following ingenious way of carrying the brandy. Guts of oxen or cows are procured, well washed, and then filled with water to keep them damp and ready to receive the liquor, then wound round and round the bodies of the smugglers and concealed as much as possible in their most secret parts. This is perhaps the most difficult thing to do, as the convict is never for a moment alone; but he generally succeeds in deceiving both his escort and the guards. An old thief is rarely caught; he is sure to bide his time and watch for a favourable opportunity. Thus, e.g., a smuggler is a potter by trade, and has been sent for to mend a stove in town. He climbs up to the top of it, and winds the guts round his body, while the escort stands

below waiting patiently for him to come down. The next difficulty is to smuggle the liquor into the prison, as each convict is examined by the corporal on duty before he lets him pass through the prison gates. Sometimes he will manage to slip through with his precious cargo and deliver it safely to his employer, but not unfrequently the corporal has his suspicions, and discovers the guts with the liquor. The smuggler, however, is prepared for every emergency; he has provided himself with a small coin, which he tries to slip into the corporal's hand. A corporal is not always inaccessible to bribery, and he may let the man pass without any further remarks; but if he is an honest man and knows his duty, he reports the case to the Major, the liquor is confiscated, and the culprit severely flogged, while his employer remains unpunished. A smuggler never betrays his confederates, not from any honourable feeling, but simply because he knows that he would gain nothing by it. Generally speaking delators are well treated and even liked in a convict prison; nobody thinks any the worse of them for reporting to the Governor what is going on in the prison, and if you tried to explain to a convict why a delator ought to be shunned as a dangerous and dishonourable person, he would not understand you.

Let us suppose that the tapster has got the liquor at last; he pays his smuggler and begins to calculate his profits. Hitherto he has had only the expense, and it is evident that if he sold only the quantity of liquor which he has received his profits would be but small. So in order to make it pay he

dilutes it once more with water, and is now prepared to receive his customers. He has not long to wait, as the latter are sure to present themselves either on the first holiday or sometimes even on a week-day to spend the little hoard they have been working hard to earn. The poor prisoner has been looking forward impatiently to that happy day when he will at last be able to drink his fill, and the thought of the pleasures that await him have soothed him when he felt cross and irritable, and have rendered light many a dark hour. At last the glorious day breaks; he has managed to keep his money safe, and runs with it to the tapster. A bottle of liquor only twice diluted is set before him, but as he goes on drinking the bottle is filled with water, till at last it is nearly all water. A glass of liquor costs five or six times more than in a tavern, and it is not difficult to calculate how many glasses the convict must drink, and how much money he must spend, before he gets drunk. Owing to the long period of enforced abstinence intoxication sets in at a much earlier period than might reasonably be expected, and he goes on drinking till he has spent all his money. He then pawns first his new clothes, for the tapster is also a pawnbroker, then his old things, and finally the articles of clothing that have been provided by the Government. When he has nothing left that might be disposed of, he betakes himself to his bed, to awaken the next day with a terrible headache. He again pays the tapster a visit, this time to beg for a drop of liquor, just one mouthful of spirits, to take away the racking pain, but the spirit-seller remains

inexorable, and the poor man goes away sadly to his work, and plods on and toils for months to come, feeding on the memory of that glorious day when he drank to his heart's content, and beginning gradually to look forward to another bright day, a repetition of the first, which is still far off, but which will come some time if he will only be patient and save his money.

Nor does the tapster forget himself. He waits till he has earned a considerable sum, some thirty or fifty roubles, and then sends for more wine, which he does not mix with water this time, as he means to drink it all himself. A day is fixed for the feast—the subaltern officers have been bribed to permit it—and there is much eating, drinking, and music going on. As soon as the tapster has finished his own liquor he goes to one of his *confrères*, who has been expecting his visit for some time, then to a third and fourth, and so on till he has spent his last copeck. All the time this revelling lasts (and it sometimes lasts for days), his comrades take great pains to keep him out of the way if the Major should come in unexpectedly; but in spite of their precautions the Major, who is always suspecting mischief, does find him out occasionally. He is immediately taken to the guard-room and searched; his money, if he has any left, is confiscated, and he himself flogged. The next day he re-appears in the prison as if nothing had happened, and takes up his profession as usual. Some of these revellers who are rich will occasionally elude the vigilance of the officers, and bribe their escort to accompany them to some haunt of vice in

the suburbs of the town instead of going to work. Here a feast is prepared, ladies are invited, and the convict eats, drinks, and flirts to his heart's content. Such excursions are very rare, however, as they cost a great deal and are difficult to manage, and the admirers of the fair sex generally prefer cheaper and less dangerous interviews with their sweethearts.

Soon after my arrival in the prison I had noticed a remarkably handsome young convict. He might almost be called a lad, seeing that he was hardly twenty-three years old. There was something so girlish in his blue eyes, regular features, and delicate complexion that I could hardly bring myself to believe that this innocent-looking boy could have committed a crime grievous enough to justify his being among us. And yet he was in the 'Special Department,' which means as much as being sentenced to penal servitude for life. He knew no trade, yet he never was without money. He was one of the laziest and most untidy beings I have ever seen. His name was Sirótkin. If any one made him a present of some article of clothing, e.g., a red shirt, Sirótkin always seemed delighted with it, and would strut about the prison to exhibit his new clothes. He never drank or played at cards, hardly ever quarrelled with any one, but spent most of his leisure time walking up and down in the open space behind the prison, his hands in his pockets, looking thoughtful and preoccupied. What he could possibly be thinking about is more than I can say. I once or twice tried to speak to him out of curiosity, ask some trivial question, or make some remark, he always

answered me respectfully, not like the other convicts; but his answers were always short and simple, and he looked as shy as a child of ten years with whom a grown-up person would suddenly begin a serious conversation. Whenever he had any money he never spent it on useful things; I never knew him to buy a pair of new boots or to get his jacket mended, but he would invest it in kalatchi or gingerbread, and sit down and eat his goodies like a child of seven years. 'Oh, Sirótkin, Sirótkin,' the other convicts used often to say to him, 'you are an orphan from Kasan.'[1]

At night, when all the others were at their work, he would roam about the cells without speaking to anyone in a listless apathetic way. If anyone spoke to him or laughed at him (by no means an unusual occurrence), he would leave the room silently, and perhaps with a blush if the jest had been too coarse.

One day I was ill and lying in my bed in the hospital. Sirótkin happened to be my neighbour, and one evening in the dusk he became quite talkative and animated, and told me how he had enlisted, and how bitterly his mother cried when he left her, and what a hard time he had as a recruit. He added that he had hated that life because his officers treated the young recruit badly, and the colonel was always dissatisfied with him.

'But how did it all end?' asked I. 'And what

[1] A pun which cannot be translated. Sirótkin means literally 'that which belongs to a young orphan.' 'An orphan from Kasan' is a proverbial expression, like 'a witch from Kieff,' &c.

crime can you have committed to be sentenced to penal servitude for life, my poor Sirótkin?'

'I only served in the regiment one year, Alexander Petróvitch, and I am here for murdering my colonel, Grigóry Petróvitch.'

'I heard that story, Sirótkin, but would not believe it. How can you be a murderer?'

'It is quite true, Alexander Petróvitch. My life was so very hard that I was driven to do it.'

'But how do the other recruits bear it? Nobody expects a soldier's life to be very easy, but they get accustomed to its hardships, and by and by become good soldiers. I fear, my friend, that your mother spoiled you, and stuffed you with milk and gingerbread till you were eighteen years old.'

'Yes, sir, my mother did love me dearly. I have heard since that after I left her she took to her bed and never left it again. . . . Well, my life was terribly hard. My colonel took a dislike to me—I do not know why—and I was always being punished. And yet I tried to do my duty. I did, indeed; I was always obedient, never touched brandy, and never stole anything. But they seemed all to be such a hard-hearted set, nobody had any pity for me, and I had no place where I could hide myself and have a good cry. Sometimes I would creep into a corner, and cry a little there. One day, or rather one night, I was on guard. It was in autumn, the wind whistled in the trees, and the night was so dark that I could see nothing at all. I was walking up and down all by myself, and feeling so wretched. I cannot tell you how wretched I was. I took my gun

from my shoulder, unscrewed the bayonet, and laid it on the ground; then I pulled off my right boot, put the muzzle to my breast, leaned heavily on it, pressing down the trigger at the same time with my big toe. It missed fire! I examined the gun carefully, cleaned it, loaded it afresh, and again put it to my breast. The powder flashed in the pan, but the gun missed fire again. Well, I put on my boot, shouldered my gun, screwed on the bayonet, and again marched up and down. And then I made up my mind to do something desperate only to have done with that wretched life. Half an hour later up comes the colonel at the head of the patrol. What does he do but swear at me for not carrying my gun properly. So I took it in both hands, and stuck the bayonet right into him. I was severely flogged —I was sentenced to four thousand strokes—and then sent to the Special Department.'

His tale was true. He would not have been sent to the Special Department if he had not committed a capital crime, that was certain. Sirótkin was the only good-looking fellow of the lot. There were fifteen prisoners in the Special Department, and with the exception of two or three they were perfectly horrible to look at. I may, perhaps, mention some of them later on. Sirótkin was a great friend of Gásin, the hero of the present chapter and the same who burst into the kitchen and upset all my ideas about prison life.

This Gásin was a terrible being. He always filled me with a feeling of inexpressible repugnance. I do

not think that there are many like him in this world—it would become too much like hell if this were the case. I remember seeing in Toból'sk two famous robbers and murderers, Kámeneff and Sokolóff; but neither of them produced on me the same impression as Gásin. Somehow or other he always reminded me of a gigantic spider. He was a Tartar by birth, the strongest man in the prison, of medium height and very broad in proportion, with an abnormally big head. His gait was clumsy and shambling, and he had a peculiarly disagreeable hang-dog look about him which made him even more repulsive. The convicts told wonderful tales about him; he was known to have served in the army, and to have escaped from the mines at Nertschinsk. He had been exiled to Siberia more than once, had escaped repeatedly, had taken a false name, and finally had been sent to the Special Department in our prison. It was asserted that he was passionately fond of murdering young children, that he would entice his victim into a lonely place, frighten and torture it there, and after having enjoyed the agonies and terror of the poor little thing, proceed to kill it—slowly, deliberately, prolonging its sufferings as much as possible. Perhaps all these tales were without foundation, perhaps they had sprung from the impression which Gásin produced on his comrades; but they seemed to be in accordance with his whole being. So long as he was sober he always behaved remarkably well, and even ostentatiously avoided quarrels and fights, perhaps because he thought himself too much superior to the others to

honour them by quarrelling or fighting with them. He spoke very little, and hardly ever about himself. His movements were calm, slow, and self-possessed.

He was shrewd and clever, and there was a haughty, sarcastic look in his face, especially when he smiled. He sold liquor, and was one of the wealthiest tapsters in the place, but never got drunk more often than twice in the course of a year, when the whole brutality of his nature seemed to break out. He generally began by making sarcastic remarks about other people in their hearing; these seemed to have been carefully prepared a long time ago, so cruel and bitter were they; then, as he became more intoxicated, he grew violent, and snatching up a knife would attack everybody who came in his way. At first the convicts would run away from him and hide themselves, till at last they grew tired of these periodical attacks of drunken fury, and resolved to put an end to them. Accordingly, at the next paroxysm, ten or more of his room-fellows sprang upon him and began to beat him. It is impossible to imagine anything more cruel or brutal than this beating; they beat him on the chest, the stomach, the head, etc., and never left off belabouring him till he fell senseless to the ground. Any other man would have been killed by the blows, but not so Gásin. After the punishment he was wrapped up in his fur coat and carried to his pallet, where he was left to sleep off his intoxication. The next day he would get up as usual and go about his work, looking a trifle more sullen than usual. Every time Gásin got drunk his fellow-prisoners knew that that day would end badly for

him. He knew it too, and still went on drinking and getting drunk. Some years had passed away thus, when at last it became evident that Gásin had lost much of his pristine vigour. He began to complain about various aches and pains, grew weaker and weaker, and spent most of his time in the hospital. 'He is growing old,' the convicts would say.

He entered the kitchen, followed by the wretched Pole with his fiddle, and stood still in the middle of the floor, casting a scrutinising glance around him. Everybody was silent. At last his eye fell upon my comrade and myself; he scowled at us with an expression of hatred such as I have seldom seen in any human face, and staggering up to the table he said in Russian, with a self-complacent smile as if he had hit upon something very ingenious:

'May I ask you where you get the money from to pay for your tea?'

My comrade and myself looked silently at each other, thinking it best not to answer him, as a contradictory answer would only have driven him wild.

'Have you got money here with you? Have you got much money, hey?' he went on asking. 'Did you come here to drink tea? Did you come here on purpose to drink tea? Answer me, you ——.'

When he saw that we were resolved not to answer him and to take no notice of him, he grew purple in the face and trembled with rage. A large wooden tray happened to stand near him in the corner. It

was used by the cooks to lay on it the hunches of bread that were cut off for the convicts' dinners, but it was empty now. He seized it with both hands and flourished it over our heads. In another moment our skulls would have been shattered and our brains dashed out. All the convicts sat motionless and silent in their places—not a voice was raised in our defence. They all knew that if we had been killed they would have had to bear the consequences as well as Gásin, as there would have been no end to the trials and cross-questionings, etc.; but such was their hatred towards us that they would rather have suffered anything than have saved our lives. They evidently enjoyed our critical position.

But things turned out differently, happily for us. He was just going to let the tray fall on our heads, when a voice was heard in the passage, shouting,

'Gásin, they have stolen the brandy!'

He dashed the tray on the floor, and rushed out of the kitchen like a madman.

'God has saved them!' said the convicts, and I often heard them repeat this saying among themselves. I could never learn whether the alarm which was given from without had been given on purpose to save us, or whether the liquor had indeed been stolen.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS (*continued*).

AFTER the last roll had been called the convicts were locked up in their cells till next morning. This ceremony of roll-calling was generally performed by a sergeant-at-arms, assisted by two soldiers. Sometimes it took place in the courtyard, when it was superintended by the officer; but more frequently the roll was called in the prison, as it happened today. Calling the roll may seem a simple enough performance to many, but to our sergeant and his assistants it presented many and great difficulties. They made repeated mistakes, and had to come back several times before they were quite sure that we were all present. At last they withdrew and locked us in.

There were about thirty men in our cell, and as it was too early to go to sleep we were evidently expected to find some employment for ourselves.

The only warder who remained in the prison was the invalided soldier whom I have mentioned above. There was besides a senior in each cell who had been elected by the Major from among the convicts for his good behaviour. It happened not unfrequently,

however, that the senior was caught infringing some rule or regulation, when he was flogged and ignominiously discarded, and another elected in his place. Our senior was Akím Akímytch, who to my great astonishment repeatedly tried to assert his authority by scolding the convicts, who only laughed at him for his pains. The invalided soldier knew his position better, and sat quietly in his corner, mending a boot. He seldom made any remarks, and the men seemed to ignore him altogether. I was forcibly struck on this first day of my new life by the curious fact that all those who are not convicts and only come into daily contact with them, beginning with the sentinel at our gates and ending with the Governor, should have the most exaggerated ideas about convict prisoners. They seem to be constantly haunted by the fear that the convicts are on the point of committing some horrible crime, some desperate deed, and take vengeance on the unoffending causes of their terror by bullying and browbeating them without the slightest provocation on their side. The prisoners are not ignorant of the terror they inspire, and are rather proud of having such a reputation. Yet they love and respect those superiors best who are not afraid of them and show by their behaviour that they trust them. I remember that once or twice during my stay in the prison the Governor or some other officer visited us without an escort, and I shall never forget the respectful, I might almost say enthusiastic, reception which the convicts gave him. They saw at once that he trusted them and did not fear them as the others did, and

they were grateful for it. I do not wonder that people who have never come into contact with convicts, and in whose minds the words 'convict prisoner' are associated with horrible tales of brutal crime, cruelty, incendiarism, highway robbery, should experience a certain sensation of fear and disgust at the sight of a group of men accoutred in the grotesque prison garb, with half-shaved heads and marked on the brow and cheeks with the signs of their shame; but there is a good deal of exaggeration in their fear. A convict, even if he should be the most daring of men, does not pounce upon a fellow-creature and stab him without any provocation, except in very rare cases, when the deed is committed not from any personal motive of revenge and hatred, but merely for the sake of saving himself from imminent punishment by being brought up for trial for a fresh crime. I remember a curious psychological fact of this kind which came under my notice in the convict prison.

There was among us a military prisoner who had been sent to prison for two years for some breach of discipline. He was one of the greatest braggarts and cowards which the world has ever seen, two qualities which are seldom found combined in a Russian soldier. Doútoff (that was his name) left the prison at the expiration of his sentence and went back to his regiment. But, as is frequently the case, his morals had not been improved by his stay in the prison. Three weeks after he had left it he committed a fresh crime—picked a lock, and insulted his officer. He was brought up before a court-martial

and sentenced to run the gauntlet. He was a coward, as I have said before, and mortally afraid of physical pain. He managed to secrete a knife about his person, and on the eve of the fatal day he attempted to stab one of his officers as he entered the cell. He was perfectly aware that by this act he only aggravated his punishment, and yet he did it merely for the sake of having the terrible moment put off for a few days at the utmost. He did not even wound the officer, nor had he had, I suppose, the least intention of doing so.

I have frequently had the opportunity of observing convicts on the eve of the fatal day or even a few hours before they were led out to be flogged, and nearly every one of them was in a terrible state of excitement. I used to meet them in the hospital, of which I was frequently an inmate in those days. As it may appear strange that a sick convict should be flogged, I must explain here that it was the custom for prisoners who were awaiting their trial, or who had been sentenced to the bastinado, to take refuge in the hospital. A prisoner who is awaiting his trial is even worse off than a regular convict; he is pent up with many others in a small, ill-lighted, ill-ventilated room, and insufficiently fed and clothed. The hospital, dreary as it is, is still a kind of refuge where he can rest for a short time under the care of the physician. It is well known among Russian convicts that their best friend is the doctor. He never makes any difference between them and other people, as nearly everybody else does, involuntarily perhaps, with the exception of the labouring

classes. They never blame a convict for his crime, whatever he may have done, but forgive him everything for the sake of his sufferings and his punishment. In their eyes this is a sufficient atonement even for the greatest crime that a mortal can commit. The popular name for a criminal is the 'unfortunate one,' and a crime goes by the name of a 'misfortune.' When at last the prisoners are obliged to leave the hospital to meet their fate, some try to hide their feelings from pride, but they rarely succeed in deceiving their comrades, who sympathise with them and are silent from pity. I once knew a young soldier, a convict who had been sentenced to the full number of strokes for murder. He dreaded his punishment so much that on the eve of the fatal day he swallowed a tumbler of brandy mixed with snuff. I must observe here that it is the custom among convicts to get drunk before they are flogged, as there exists a superstition to the effect that an intoxicated man does not feel the pain as sharply as he would if he were sober. The liquor is smuggled in long beforehand, and the criminal would rather go without the necessaries of life for days than deny himself the glass of spirit which he drinks a quarter of an hour before he is flogged. The poor young fellow was seized at once with violent vomiting and hemorrhage; he was taken in a state of perfect unconsciousness to the hospital, which he never left again. In the course of a few days symptoms of consumption declared themselves, and he died six months later in the prime of life. The doctors who treated him were totally at a loss to account for

this sudden outbreak of the disease in an individual who had hitherto been always in good health.

But while I am speaking of the cowardice of the convicts and their dread of physical pain, I must not omit to say that there are some who are perfect Spartans in their indifference to it. Several of these cases have come under my own observation, one of which particularly has left a deep impression on my mind. One fine summer day the rumour spread in our wards that the famous robber Orloff was going to be flogged that evening, and that he would be brought into our ward afterwards. The patients were naturally much excited, and I myself could not help feeling rather interested in the news, as I had heard a great many wonderful tales about his courage and his deeds. Fortunately for mankind, there are few people like this human monster, who had murdered old men and young children from no other motive than that of satisfying his own thirst for blood. He had an iron power of will, and was proud of it. He had been caught at last, convicted of numerous crimes, and sentenced to the full number of strokes (4,000). It was night when they brought him in, and the candles had been lighted in the ward. Orloff was almost unconscious, deathly pale; his coal-black hair was all knotted and tangled. His back presented a terrible aspect; it was swollen and of a deep livid colour. The convicts tended him carefully all through the night, applying cool compresses to his bruised back, turning him on his side when he wanted to move, and giving him medicine. They could not have been more watchful and tender

if he had been their own brother. The next day he recovered consciousness, and to my great astonishment was able to take a few turns up and down the ward. He had received at once one half of the strokes, and the doctor only stopped the execution when he saw that the man was half-dead and would undoubtedly have succumbed had it been carried on any further, especially as he was of slim build and delicate constitution, and much weakened by his long captivity while awaiting his trial. Yet, in spite of all this, Orloff quickly recovered his strength. He wished to be well soon—he willed it, in fact, and he accomplished it. I made his acquaintance from curiosity, and studied him closely for a whole week. He was a curious subject for a psychologist to study. I remember seeing once in Toból'sk another celebrated criminal who had been captain of a band of robbers. There was nothing manly about him, nothing even slightly suggestive of a higher life. His whole heart and soul were bent upon satisfying his loathsome appetites, beast was written in his face, and I am sure that anyone who had happened to stand near him without knowing who he was would at once have been repelled by the animal expression of his face. He had cut many a man's throat without hesitation, yet I am almost persuaded that he would have trembled with fear at the thought of punishment. Orloff was quite the reverse; in him the will had triumphed over the flesh and conquered it—he scorned pain and suffering, and respected the authority of no human being. His energy was perfectly wonderful. He never rested till he reached

his aim. I was much struck by his supercilious manner, and the almost preternatural calmness with which he regarded everything. He never bragged about his exploits, although he could not help knowing that the other convicts looked up to him with admiration. I asked him many questions about himself, which he answered readily, telling me that he was anxious to get well as soon as possible, so as to be able to go through the rest of his punishment. He had feared at first that he would die under it. 'But now,' added he, winking at me, 'when it is all over I shall start for Nertschinsk with a party of prisoners and escape on the road. I have quite made up my mind to run away, indeed I have. If only my back would get well quickly!' And during the five days he was in our ward he looked forward eagerly to the time when he might leave it again. He was full of fun and liked a joke. I tried once or twice to speak to him about his exploits; this was evidently a sore point with him, but nevertheless he always answered me readily. But when it dawned on him that I was appealing to his conscience, his whole manner changed at once; he stared at me with an expression of mingled pride, contempt, and even pity, as if I had suddenly become in his eyes a miserable, silly little boy to whom he could not talk as he would have done to a grown-up man. A moment later he burst into a good-humoured laugh, and I am afraid that he may often have laughed at the remembrance of my words. He left the hospital long before his back was well, and as I happened to be leaving at

the same time we walked part of the way together. He shook hands with me at parting, which was a sign of great favour on his part.

When we were locked up for the night, our cell suddenly assumed a more homelike and comfortable aspect. Night is the only time when a convict feels at home in his prison. During the day he is always on the alert, always expecting a sudden irruption, an unwelcome visit from the officers on duty. But as soon as the doors were locked everybody sat down quietly in his own place, and almost every one got out some work. The room was suddenly lighted up, as each man had his own candle and candlestick, the latter being frequently made of wood. The air grew worse as the night advanced. In one corner a group of men squatted round a small piece of carpet which served as card-table. There is almost in every cell a convict who is the fortunate owner of a square bit of carpet, a candle, and a pack of horribly greasy cards, all of which articles are designated collectively by the name of 'maïdán.' A maïdán is let for the night for fifteen copecks. The men always gambled high, each player laying down before him a heap of copper coins, and never leaving the game till he had either won or lost everything. Sometimes these card parties would last all night and only come to an end when the doors were unlocked in the early morning. There were in our cell, as well as in the other cells of the prison, beggars—poor wretches who had either gambled away all their money or spent it in drink, or else had been born beggars. When I speak of men being born beggars, I mean to say that in our

nation, even under the most favourable and exceptional circumstances, there are, and always will be, certain remarkable individuals whose fate it is to be always poor, always beggars, even if they should try hard to earn their living in some honourable way. Their clothes are always shabby, and they themselves seem perfectly unable to help themselves and to assume a more independent position. It seems to have been decided for them by fate at their birth that they were never to have a will of their own, and even if they should make a faint attempt at having one that they should never carry it out, but remain the slaves of other stronger wills than their own.

As soon as a maïdán was arranged, one of these drudges would immediately come forward and offer his services. He was hired, for five copecks a night, to mount guard in the passage, and to give the alarm to the gamblers in case the Major or one of the officers on duty should come in. Not unfrequently the poor fellow had to stand for six or seven hours on a bitter cold winter night in a dark passage, listening attentively to each noise or sound from without, for sometimes the Major caught sight of the candles from outside, and burst into the prison like a whirlwind. In such cases it would have been too late to put out the candles, hide the maïdán, and pretend to be asleep. However, as a negligent sentinel was always cruelly beaten by the irate players, such interruptions were comparatively rare. Five copecks is a ridiculously small fee, even for a convict prison; but what struck me most was the cruelty and

selfishness of the men, which showed itself in many other cases besides this particular one. 'You have taken the money, and must do the work,' was an irrefutable argument. For his paltry price, the employer considered himself authorised to demand not only more than the full amount of work to which the other had pledged himself, but thought that he bestowed a favour on his drudge by employing him. The drunken reveller who scattered his money right and left without hesitation invariably cheated the poor fellow who had served him out of one-third of his due. I have seen this done frequently in other places, too, not only in a prison.

I have already said that almost everyone in our room was doing something or other, with the exception of the card-players and four or five men who lay down to sleep. My place on the pallet happened to be next the door, and I had Akím Akímytch for my *vis-à-vis*. He worked diligently till 10 or 11 P.M. making a coloured paper lantern, which had been ordered by some one in the town. He was a capital workman, and very clever with his fingers. When he had done his task, he carefully put away his tools, spread out his mattress, said his prayers, and composed himself to sleep. My left-hand neighbours were six Caucasians who had been sentenced to penal servitude for highway robberies. Two of them were Lesghines, one a Tshetshenetz, and three Tartars from Dagestan. The Tshetshenetz was a beetle-browed, sulky-looking fellow, who spoke to no one, but looked daggers at everybody, and smiled in a particularly unpleasant sardonic fashion. One of

the Lesghines was an old man with a long, sharp, hooked nose, which gave him very much the appearance of a bird of prey. His comrade Nourra had impressed me very pleasantly the very first day I saw him. He was a middle-aged man, rather short of stature but with strong bones, fair-haired with light blue eyes, the complexion of a Finnish woman, and a turned-up nose. His legs were crooked, as is often the case with people who spend most of their life on horseback, and his body perfectly covered with scars from old wounds. Although he had belonged nominally to one of the so-called peaceful tribes in the Caucasus, he had been constantly in the habit of joining the rebellious tribes secretly, and fighting with them against the Russians. He was a clever workman and a great favourite with the other convicts, who liked him for his pleasant, cheerful disposition. He was a thoroughly honest, noble-minded man, and a dishonest, filthy, or vicious action, or the aspect of a drunken convict, would rouse his indignation. Yet he never quarrelled with the offender, but merely turned away in silent disgust. He was very pious, never omitted to say his prayers, always kept the Mahomedan fasts rigorously, and would not unfrequently spend whole nights in prayer. The convicts had nicknamed him 'Nourra the Lion.' He was persuaded that he would be sent back to his home in the Caucasian mountains at the expiration of his term, and I think would have died of grief if he had been told that he would never see his own country again. I noticed him on the first day of my arrival, and it would have been difficult not to notice his

kind face, beaming with sympathy, among all the sullen scowling countenances which surrounded me. Half an hour after my arrival he came up to me and patted me on the shoulder with a good-humoured grin. I was at first at a loss to explain this demonstration, especially as he knew very little Russian. A short time later he came up again, grinned at me, and patted me again on the shoulder; and so on, *ad infinitum*, for the next three days. I found out afterwards that he had tried to express his sympathy, and to tell me that he would take me under his protection and be my friend. Dear, kind Nourra! The Tartars from Dagestan were three in number, and all three brothers. Two of them were middle-aged men, but the third, Aleï, was only twenty-two years old, and looked even younger than his age. He was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen, with a wonderfully attractive, clever face, which was the image of his beautiful soul. He was my next neighbour on the pallet, and I felt grateful to Providence for having given me such a neighbour. His smile was so sweet and childlike, and his large black eyes had such a tender, loving expression, that I always felt comforted, even in my darkest moods, when their sympathetic gaze met mine. One day, when he was still at home, his eldest brother (he had five brothers, and two had been sent to some other prison) ordered him to take his sword and mount his horse, and follow him. A Caucasian mountaineer is trained to obey his elders blindly and without asking any questions, and Aleï followed his brothers without even wishing to know where they were going. They were

bound on a plundering expedition. A wealthy Armenian merchant was going to pass on the high road. They hid themselves in an ambuscade, attacked the merchant, murdered him and his escort, and carried off the spoil. The affair got noised abroad; they were all six arrested, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude in Siberia. As there had been some extenuating circumstances in Aleï's case, his punishment was less severe than his brothers', and he was sentenced only to four years' hard labour. His brothers were very fond of him, but they treated him more as if he had been their son than their brother. He was their only comfort in their exile, and whenever their eyes lighted upon him their usually grim and sullen faces relaxed into a smile. They seldom spoke to him, as he was in their eyes only a boy, and too young to understand serious matters; but when they did exchange a few words with him I could see by the softened expression of their faces that they were joking gently with him, as one would joke with a young child. They always looked at each other and smiled good-humouredly after listening to his answer. His respect for them was so great that he hardly ever dared to address them, but waited modestly till they spoke to him. When I think of the terrible surroundings among which this boy lived for four years, where the very air which he breathed was tainted with vice, I cannot but wonder that he should have remained so pure in heart, so honest and loving. Perhaps he was kept from falling by his strong, manly nature and a keen innate perception of what was right and wrong. He was as chaste as a virgin.

At the sight of a cynical, impure, or dishonest action, his eyes would sparkle with indignation, which made them look handsomer than usual. He never quarrelled with anyone, and though his proud, independent nature would have keenly resented any insult that might have been offered to him, he always avoided getting mixed up in a quarrel. He treated me at first with distant politeness. I tried to talk a little to him now and then, and we soon grew more intimate. In the course of a few months he learned to speak Russian quite well, a power which was more than his brothers ever attained during all the time they were in prison. He struck me from the first as being a very clever lad, modest and refined in his feelings, and of a thoughtful turn of mind. I always looked upon Aleï as upon a being who was altogether far above the average human beings, and I shall always look back upon our meeting and being together as one of the happiest meetings of my life. There are some natures which I think must be especially blessed by God; they seem unable to turn to the bad, and one never need feel anxious about them. I feel perfectly sure about Aleï. I wonder where he is now.

One evening, long after my arrival in the prison, I was lying on my pallet in a brown study. Aleï, who was seldom idle, was lying by my side, doing nothing, as it happened to be one of their Mahomedan fast-days, when they were forbidden to work. He was lying on his back with his hands clasped behind his head, deep in thought. Suddenly he asked me:

'Don't you feel very sad?'

I looked at him in amazement; it was so unlike Aleï, who was always so thoughtful, and so afraid of hurting other people's feelings, to ask such a question. But when I glanced more attentively at his face, I saw at once that he had asked that question not from idle curiosity, but because his own heart was full of sweet, sad memories and unspeakably bitter grief. I told him so at once. He sighed and smiled sadly. I liked his smile, it was so tender and loving. When he smiled he exhibited two rows of pearly white teeth, which the greatest beauty in the world might have envied him.

'Well, Aleï, I dare say you have been thinking about Dagestan, and how they celebrate the feast there to-day?'

'Yes,' replied he, in an enthusiastic tone, and his eyes began to sparkle. 'How do you know what I have been thinking about?'

'It is easy enough to see. Would you not rather be there than here to-day?'

'Oh, do not speak of it.'

'I suppose you have beautiful flowers there now. It must be like a Paradise.'

'Oh, please do not speak of it.' The poor lad was much excited.

'Tell me, Aleï, have you a sister?'

'Yes; but why do you want to know?'

'She must be very handsome, if she is at all like you.'

'Like me! She is the handsomest woman in all Dagestan. You never saw such a beauty in your life. My mother was a very handsome woman too.'

'Did your mother love you?'

'Oh, don't ask me such a question. I was her favourite child; she loved me more than my sister and my other brothers. I fear that she is dead now; she must be dead, for she came to me in my sleep last night, and cried over me.'

He broke off suddenly, and did not speak again that night. But ever since that evening he always sought a pretext for speaking to me, although he never began the conversation. Perhaps he thought it would be taking too great a liberty with me to speak first without being spoken to. I liked to ask him questions about the Caucasus and his old life. His brothers never interfered with our talk, and seemed rather to feel flattered that I should take such an interest in Aleï. In the course of time they also grew very affectionate towards me. Aleï helped me in my outdoor work, and was very attentive and obliging to me indoors. It was evident that he was delighted to be able to do something for me and give me pleasure. He was very clever with his fingers, and had learned to sew, make boots, and even became a tolerably good joiner. His brothers praised him, and were proud of him.

I said one day to him, 'Aleï, why don't you learn to read and write Russian? It would be a very useful thing for you to know here in Siberia.'

'I should like to learn very much indeed. But who is to teach me?'

'Why, I should think there were men enough here who can read and write. Would you like me to teach you?'

'Oh, please do.' And he rose eagerly from his pallet, and folded his hands pleadingly.

We began our lessons the next night. I had a Russian translation of the New Testament—the only book which is not prohibited in a convict prison. In a few weeks Aleï had learned to read fluently, and in three months he had completely mastered his book. He was passionately fond of reading. One day, when we were reading the Sermon on the Mount together, I noticed that he pronounced certain passages with a peculiar emphasis, and asked him if he liked what we had just been reading. He looked up and blushed crimson. 'Oh yes,' said he, 'oh yes. Issa is a holy prophet. Issa speaks the words of God. How beautiful this is!'

'Tell me what place you like best?'

'This one, where he says "Forgive, love, do not offend anyone, love your enemies." How beautifully he speaks.'

He turned to his brothers, who were listening to our conversation, and began to tell them something eagerly. They talked long and gravely together, nodding their heads as if in approval of what was said. Then they turned to me, with the quiet dignified smile I liked so well, and informed me that Issa was a prophet of God and had done great miracles, that he had formed a bird of clay, breathed on it, and that it had flown away—all which was written in their sacred books. I suppose they thought that they were giving me great pleasure by praising 'Issa,' and poor Aleï was overjoyed that his brothers should have been so kind to me.

I then taught him to write. He got paper, pens, and ink (he would not hear of my buying it), and learnt to write beautifully in two months or so. His brothers' pride and joy knew no bounds, and they tried to express their gratitude to me by helping me when and where they could. Aleï loved me as dearly as if I had been his brother. I shall never forget our parting when he left the prison. He had asked me to go with him to a secluded spot behind the barracks, and there he fell on my neck and wept. He had never kissed me before, and I had never seen him cry.

'You have done so much for me,' said he, weeping; 'more than my father and mother ever did: you made a man of me, and God will reward you, and I shall never forget you.'

I often wonder where he is now, my own sweet lad, my Aleï!

There were also six Poles in our prison, all, or nearly all, of them highly educated and refined gentlemen, who kept close together and plainly showed their aversion to the other convicts, for which behaviour the latter hated and detested them with all their might and main. They were all morbidly sensitive and irritable, and I shall have occasion to mention them repeatedly hereafter. These Poles sometimes lent me books to read during the latter period of my imprisonment. I shall never forget the strange impression which the first book I read after so many years produced on me. This is a subject I shall dwell on more particularly hereafter, as it is full of interest to me, though I fear that few

will be able to enter fully into my feelings. All I am going to say on that subject now is that mental privations are much harder to bear than bodily ones. The peasant who is sentenced to penal servitude loses, it is true, his home, his family—in short, everything that is dear to him—but still he remains in his own sphere and goes to live among his own class of people; while the educated man who is condemned to the same punishment as the peasant loses not only all that the latter has lost, but frequently much more. He must at once give up all those habits and customs, all those intellectual resources, which to him form part of his life, and let his mind die the slow death of starvation for want of proper food. He is like a fish out of water, which lies gasping on the sand. And thus the punishment which according to the law is the same for both criminals is ten times more hard for him to bear than for the other.

The only human being in our cell who found favour in the eyes of the Poles was a Jew, perhaps because he amused them. He was at once the favourite and the laughing-stock of the prison, and the only Jew in the place. I cannot now think of him without laughing—he was so like a plucked chicken. Issaï Fomitch, for that was his name, was about fifty years old, and rather under middle size—a puny, weak, miserable-looking creature. His face was all puckered, and his cheeks and brows marked with the hot iron. I have seldom seen such a mixture of shrewdness and simplicity, cowardice and impudence, all combined in one person. When I looked at

his puny body I could hardly believe that he had ever borne sixty lashes without succumbing on the spot. He had come to us for murder, and was looking forward impatiently to the end of his twelve years' term of imprisonment that he might be sent to a convict colony to settle there and marry; for this curious being had a very decided leaning towards holy matrimony. One thing was a great drawback to him in his prospects—the marks on his face. He confided to me with great solemnity that he had a prescription hidden away carefully for a miraculous salve which was to take away those ugly marks. He did not dare use it while he was in the prison, notwithstanding his anxious wish to get rid of his disfigurement. We were great friends. He was always in good humour, and no wonder, for he led a comparatively easy life in the prison, being exempt from hard labour owing to his being a jeweller by profession, and having almost more orders for jewellery given him than he could take, as there was no other jeweller in the place. He also combined the profitable occupations of usurer and pawnbroker, and half the prison was constantly in his debt. He had arrived at the prison before me, and one of the Poles described to me his entrance into the prison, which I shall relate later on.

The other prisoners in our cell were four Raskol'niks;[1] two or three Little Russians—sullen, unpleasant fellows; a youth of twenty-three, with a small face and sharp thin nose, who had murdered eight people; several false-coiners, one of whom was the

[1] A religious sect.

buffoon of our cell, and a number of gloomy-looking men, with shaven heads and terribly disfigured faces, who hardly ever deigned to speak to any one, and scowled at everybody with undisguised hatred. All these figures seemed to pass before my eyes like phantoms in a dream on that first terrible evening of my new life, which was spent amidst foul-mouthed abuse and filthy language, the clanking of chains, cynical laughter, in a ~~mephitic~~ smelly atmosphere. I stretched myself out on the bare boards, put my clothes under my head (for I had no pillow), and covering myself with my short fur coat, tried, but in vain, to forget myself and my new surroundings in sleep.

CHAPTER V.

MY FIRST MONTH IN THE CONVICT PRISON.

THREE days after my arrival in the prison I was ordered to go out and work, together with the other convicts. How well I remember that day—my first day of hard labour—and every little incident that occurred! Going out to work with the other prisoners was quite a new experience to me altogether, and I still felt a kind of morbid interest in the novelty of my situation. I had suffered intensely during those last three days. I was broken down, my life shattered and crushed, and yet I seemed to find a kind of cruel pleasure in repeating to myself: 'I have reached at last the end of my journey—I am a convict! And this wretched place, which fills me with sad and dismal forebodings, is to be henceforth my home! Home! And yet, who knows? Perhaps when I come to leave it after many years I may even feel sorry to go away!' The thought that I might feel sorry to leave this place filled me with horror, and then I, for the first time in my life, began to realise the full truth of the saying which I had often heard repeated and never fully believed, that man is a being who can accustom

himself to everything and anything. But my future was still very dark, and my present surroundings seemed hardly calculated to make me look forward to it with hopeful trust. The undisguised curiosity with which my new comrades watched every one of my movements, the coarse rough manner in which they treated the gentleman who had suddenly been thrown into their midst, had nearly driven me wild; and I ardently longed for work that I might begin to live as they all lived, become as one of them, and drink my cup of bitterness to the very dregs. In those days I neither saw nor heard many things which took place before my eyes, and which it would have been better for me to have seen and heard, as they would have soothed and calmed my wounded feelings, and taught me to look for the sweet kernel beneath the rough bitter husk. Two or three kind faces which shone out among the many sombre countenances which surrounded me had cheered and encouraged me greatly. Nobody could be kinder and more considerate in his behaviour than poor Akím Akímytch. 'There are everywhere bad and good people,' said I to myself, 'and who knows?—perhaps the people here are not even as bad, at least some of them, as many who are not in prison.' I could not help smiling at my own folly that I should try and make myself believe that there could be good people in a convict prison. I little suspected then that I was right in my surmise.

Among others there was one prisoner whose character I did not learn to appreciate till many years after, and yet we were together almost all the

time of my captivity. This was the convict Soushíloff, who waited upon me. I had also another servant, the convict Ossip, whom Akím Akímytch had strongly recommended to me to engage as cook almost the very first day of my arrival, saying that he would cook my dinner for me for thirty copecks a month if I did not like the prison diet and could afford to find my own dinners. Ossip was one of the four cooks who had been appointed by the convicts for the two kitchens. They were not obliged to accept the situation unless they liked it, and might throw it up any time they chose. They were exempt from hard labour, and their duties consisted in baking the bread and preparing the shtshi, and keeping the kitchens clean. Our cooks went by the name of 'kitchenmaids.' This was by no means a term of derision, as the cooks were always elected among the better class of criminals, but rather a term of affection, a pet name for those useful members of society. Ossip had been re-elected several times and been 'kitchenmaid' for many years, though he occasionally left his situation for a time when the temptation to smuggle liquor became too strong for him. He was a smuggler by profession, and, oddly enough, a remarkably steady and honest fellow, of a meek, gentle disposition, who never had had a quarrel with any of his fellow-prisoners. All the cooks, including Ossip, sold liquor, and, if he had only been less afraid of being flogged and more venturesome, Ossip, with his passion for smuggling, might in time have made as much money as Gásin. We were always great friends, Ossip and I. As from my speaking about finding

my own dinners the reader might possibly be led to suppose that I had a nice little repast prepared for me every day, I hasten to dispel any such illusion by assuring him that I hardly ever spent more than a rouble a month on my food. My dinner consisted for many years of one pound of meat which Ossip roasted for me every day, and badly enough too. I always ate the prison bread, and if I was exceptionally hungry I would try and overcome my repugnance to the shtshi and eat some. After a while I even began to relish them in spite of the black-beetles. Meat was cheap enough in Siberia—in winter time it cost only one grosh a pound. Our provisions were bought for us in the town by the invalided soldiers who lived in our cells to maintain order. As these worthies were rather afraid of the convicts, and wished to spend their last days on earth in peace and quiet, they had volunteered their services in going daily to market for us without expecting even the slightest remuneration, and thereby conciliated the good graces of the convicts. They bought brick-tea,[1] tobacco, meat, kalatchi—in short, everything except liquor, which the prisoners smuggled in themselves, and occasionally treated their invalided friends to a glassful, which was always thankfully accepted.

For many years Ossip and I never exchanged a word together. I made several attempts to draw him into a conversation, but he seemed utterly incapable of sustaining his part in it, and confined

[1] The worst kind of tea. It is mixed with sheep's blood and pressed in the shape of bricks.

himself to smiling or answering 'yes' or 'no' to all my remarks or questions.

My other help was Soushíloff, who found me out and attached himself to me without the least encouragement on my part. I cannot even remember now when he first joined himself to my staff. He took it upon himself to wash my clothes. There was no wash-house in the prison, and all the washing had to be done in small wooden troughs over a large cesspool which was situated behind the barracks. Besides being my washerwoman, Soushíloff had a knack of making himself generally useful; he would make my tea, run errands for me, find out things that I wanted to know, take my jacket to the tailor to be mended, and black my boots about four times a month. And all these various jobs were performed in such a grave business-like way, as if heaven only knows what responsibility rested on his shoulders. In short, he had completely fused our two destinies into one, and taken all my private concerns upon himself. Thus, e.g., he would never say, 'You have so many clean shirts,' or 'Your jacket is torn'; but always, 'We have so many clean shirts,' 'Our jacket is torn'! His whole life was devoted to my service. He knew no handicraft, and I suppose that all the money he ever possessed were the few groshes that I gave him occasionally. I really do not think that he could have been happy unless he had attached himself to some one, and he probably preferred me to other people because I was more civilised and paid him better than the rest. Soushíloff belonged to that class of people who never could make money,

or at least keep it in their pockets when they had some. There were many such in the prison, and I have spoken of them before. The most prominent trait in their character was a strong tendency, or rather an intense desire, to keep in the background as much as possible whenever there might be any occasion for them to come forward. They cannot help it—it is their nature to be so.

Soushíloff was one of the most abject, wretched-looking mortals it has ever been my lot to meet. He always looked as if everybody's hand were against him, though to my knowledge nobody ever hurt him in the prison. I always felt sorry for him, though it would have been difficult to assign any reason for my sympathy. I had tried in vain to draw him into conversation; he never knew what to say, and seemed so painfully conscious of this defect that the only way to cheer him up after such unlucky attempts at conversation was to ask him to do something for me.

He was of middle stature, neither plain nor handsome, neither old nor young, neither clever nor stupid, fair-haired and slightly marked with small-pox. The convicts often joked him for having 'exchanged himself,' as they called it, on his way to Siberia for a silver rouble and a red shirt. To 'exchange oneself' means in prison slang to exchange names and consequently sentences with some one else. However incredible this may seem it is true, nevertheless, and the custom existed in full vigour during my time in Siberia; it was sanctified by old traditions, and the transactions were conducted according to

certain forms. I should never have believed such a thing to be possible if a similar instance to the one I am going to relate had not taken place before my own eyes. An 'exchange' takes place in the following manner. A large party of convicts are on their way to Siberia—some are going to the mines, others to a convict prison, and the rest to a convict colony. On the road one of them—e.g. a certain Mikhaïloff—expresses a desire to 'exchange' himself. He is sentenced to penal servitude for so many years, and does not in the least care about going to a convict prison. So he casts his eyes about, and finally discovers some poor wretch whose punishment is less severe than his own; he may be going to the mines for a short time, or to a settlement, or have been sentenced to penal servitude for a few years. We will call this poor wretch Soushíloff. He has been born a serf, and is sent to the colonies perhaps for some trifling offence, through some caprice of his master, etc. Soushíloff is hungry and cold and tired; he has walked 1,500 versts without a copeck in his pocket, living on the coarse food provided by the Government, and not being able to afford himself even a cup of tea. His convict garb is barely sufficient to protect him from the inclemencies of the weather. Mikhaïloff makes up to Soushíloff; they become friends, and one fine day, on arriving at the next stage, where they are to rest a day or two, he treats him to as much liquor as the other can drink. Finally he proposes to him to exchange names. 'You see my name is Mikhaïloff. I am not going to a common prison like the rest of

you, but to the "Special Department," and being "Special" it must naturally be better than one of your common prisons.'

The fact is that few people knew anything about this so-called 'Special Department.' It existed somewhere in an out-of-the-way corner of Siberia, and so few convicts had been sent to it—not more than seventy in my time—that its whereabouts was by no means easy to discover. I have frequently met people who were well acquainted with Siberia, and had lived and served there for years without having heard anything about the 'Special Department' till I told them about it. It is mentioned in the Penal Code in the following terms:—'A Special Department will be established in the convict prison at —— for the most important criminals, until the necessary steps have been taken towards settling the duration of their term of exile.' The convicts who were in that department did not know whether they were sentenced for lifetime or only for a term. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that neither Soushíloff nor any of his party knew anything about this place, perhaps with the exception of Mikhaïloff, who had reasons of his own for suspecting what it might possibly be. Soushíloff was exiled to one of the convict settlements. Was there ever a more fortunate coincidence for Mikhaïloff? 'Would you like to exchange names?' Poor Soushíloff is drunk; his simple soul is filled with gratitude towards Mikhaïloff who has been so kind to him; he cannot find it in his heart to say 'no.' Besides, he has heard the other convicts talk among themselves about exchanging names, and knows that

it is frequently done. They agree. Mikhaïloff takes advantage of Soushíloff's childlike simplicity, and buys his name from him for a silver rouble and a red shirt, both objects being handed over to him on the spot in the presence of witnesses. The next morning Soushíloff has sufficiently recovered his senses to realise that he has pledged himself rashly; but Mikhaïloff stands treat again, and when he refuses to let his victim have any more liquor, why, there is the rouble to fall back upon, and the red shirt follows the rouble. He has got into a scrape now and cannot get out of it again. He must either give back the money or keep the false name; and where is Soushíloff to get a whole rouble from? In vain he asks for mercy. The affair comes before the *artél*, and he is plainly told that he must either keep his promise or else the *artél* will force him to give back the rouble. It stands to reason that if the *artél* were to excuse one of its members from keeping his promise the whole system of exchanging names would fall to the ground. The poor fellow knows that if he persists in making a fuss about the matter and in refusing to keep his promise he will be severely beaten, nay, perhaps killed, and with a heavy heart he accepts his destiny. The exchange of names is made known to the rest of the party. Mikhaïloff stands treat once more, and the others don't care where Mikhaïloff or Soushíloff go to finally, especially after the former has treated them so handsomely. At the next stage the roll is called. 'Mikhaïloff,' shouts the officer on duty. 'Present,' replies Soushíloff, and *vice versâ*. In Tobólsk the

convicts separate to go to their respective places of destination. Mikhaïloff walks off to the settlements, and Soushíloff is sent to the 'Special Department' with a double escort. The matter can't be helped now, for the poor fellow has no means of proving his identity. Nobody knows where the witnesses are now, and even if they could be found they would be sure to swear that Soushíloff is Mikhaïloff. And this is the way in which Soushíloff got into the 'Special Department' for a rouble and a red shirt, and was laughed at into the bargain by the convicts for having exchanged names for such a trifling sum. Generally the convict who gives his name to another and takes his instead demands a high price, not unfrequently thirty or fifty roubles.

We had been living together for some years, Soushíloff and I, and he had really become very much attached to me, and I rather liked him. One day—I shall always blame myself for my cruelty—he had neglected to do something I had asked him to do for me. I felt very much vexed about it. As it happened, I had just paid him for his services, and said sharply: 'There, Soushíloff, you are ready enough to take my money, yet you don't take any pains to do what I tell you.' Soushíloff did not answer me back, but ran off immediately to see about the matter. A few days passed; Soushíloff seemed very much out of sorts and cast down about something. It never once crossed my mind that my careless words might have caused his grief; but knowing that another convict, Anton Vassilyeff, was worrying him about a trifling debt, I supposed that

he was unable to pay him just now, and did not like to ask me for more money, and that this pecuniary difficulty was the cause of his sadness. On the third day, as I was sitting on my pallet and Soushíloff standing before me, I said to him, 'Soushíloff, I think you ought to pay Anton Vassilyeff. Here is some money for you; pay him, and have the matter settled once for all.' He seemed much astonished at my offering him the money, especially as he had reason to think that he had been sufficiently paid for his services, and could hardly expect me to give him anything for some time to come. He looked first at the money, then at me, and then rushed out of the room. I followed him, and found him leaning against the fence behind the prison, his face pressed against the planks. 'What is the matter, Soushíloff?' I asked. He did not look at me, but I saw, to my great astonishment, that tears stood in his eyes. 'You think, Alexander Petróvitch,' stammered he, trying not to look at me, 'that I—for the love of money—while I—I—!' Here he turned again to the fence with such vehemence that he hit his head against it, and sobbed aloud. That was the first time I had ever seen a man weep in the convict prison. It cost me not a little trouble to soothe him, and although henceforth he served me even with greater zeal, if possible, than before, I knew from almost imperceptible signs that in his heart he had never forgiven me my cruel reproach. Yet he never seemed hurt or offended when the other prisoners abused or laughed at him.

My meeting with another convict, called A——,

who had arrived at the prison a short time before me, rendered almost unbearably hard and bitter the first days that I spent in the penal establishment. I was prepared to meet him there. He was a striking example of the depth of degradation and depravity into which a human being can sink after he has once stifled every feeling of shame and remorse in his heart. A—— was the young man of gentle birth whom I have frequently mentioned before as our delator, who reported to the Major whatsoever happened in the prison, and was an intimate friend of his servant Fed'ka. His story is easily told. He left school when still very young, quarrelled with his relations in Moscow, who were shocked at the life he led and tried to rescue him while it was yet time, and came to St. Petersburg, where he continued his evil courses. Finding himself short of money he joined in an infernal conspiracy against some innocent people, accusing them falsely of high treason, and hoping thereby to obtain a great reward. The plot was discovered, the conspirators arrested, he among the rest, and he was exiled to Siberia for ten years. As I have said before, he was still a young man in the prime of life, and it might have been expected that such a terrible change in his life would have opened his eyes, and perhaps altered him altogether. But this strange man accepted his new destiny with the greatest indifference; all he complained of was that he had to work, and all he regretted were the haunts of vice and the pastrycooks' shops which he had frequented in St. Petersburg. He used to say that when a man was once a convict he ought to be as bad as he

possibly could be, and that it was ridiculous to try and become better. I speak of him as a phenomenon of perversity. I have spent many years among murderers and criminals of the worst possible class, but never did I meet with such terrible moral depravity and shameless vice as in A——. How I hated his cynical, sardonic smile! Yet he was shrewd, and even clever, good-looking, and not without education. The convicts were all on good terms with A——, although they knew that he was constantly in the habit of reporting to the Major what they said or did. His having found favour in the eyes of the drunken Major greatly raised him in their eyes.

Among many other lies which he had told his protector, he had assured him that he could paint portraits, and the worthy officer immediately insisted on being painted by him in his own house. Here he became intimate with Fed'ka, who ruled over his master, and consequently over the prison and the convicts. A—— used to amuse the Major by repeating the gossip of the prison to him, and the latter would frequently, when drunk, box his informer's ears and kick his shins, calling him a cursed dog, and many similar sweet names, and then sit down and order him to go on with his picture. In his eyes, A——, though a great painter as he thought, was nothing but a convict prisoner, whom he might treat as he chose. A—— went on painting the Major's portrait for a whole year without ever finishing it, when at last his sitter lost all patience, and having come to the conclusion that the portrait, instead of becoming like him, became more like any-

body else, he flew into a great rage, gave the artist a sound thrashing, and sent him back to his hard labour in the prison. A—— mourned deeply over the change, and frequently sighed for the flesh-pots in the Major's kitchen, and the pleasant days he used to spend there in company with his bosom friend, Fed'ka.

It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. We were not long in testing the truth of this proverb. A——'s disgrace put an end to the sufferings of M——, another convict whom the Major had most cruelly persecuted for the last year, because A—— hated him, and never missed an opportunity to set the Major against him. When A—— came to the prison, M—— was there all by himself, suffering terribly from his loneliness. He had separated himself from the other convicts, who inspired him with loathing, and was hated by them. Generally speaking, the position of people like M—— is almost unbearable in convict prisons. M—— did not know anything about A——'s previous history, while the latter took in the situation at a glance, and at once assured M—— that he had been exiled for some political crime like himself. Poor M—— was delighted to find a friend, a fellow-sufferer of his own class. He tended him carefully, comforted him during the first days, thinking that he too must be suffering terribly, gave him all the money he had, fed and clothed him—in a word, shared everything with him. A—— soon took to hating M——, because the latter was a noble, generous-minded man and unlike himself; and took good care to repeat to the

Major what M—— had told him about their tyrant (as he called him) in their conversations. The result was that the Major took a violent dislike to M——, and if the Commandant had not interfered occasionally, poor M—— would have had a hard time of it in the prison. Of course M—— soon learned to whom he was indebted for all this fresh trouble. It gave A—— great pleasure to meet him, and he never failed to look at him with that infernal smile of his. Later on, this wretched being ran away with another convict and their escort, but I shall have to say more of that hereafter. He made up to me at first, thinking that I did not know his story, but soon left me in peace.

During the first three days I dragged myself wearily from place to place or lay on my pallet. Akím Akímytch had recommended to me a trustworthy convict, who made my shirts for me for a trifling remuneration (the material was provided by the Government). I also followed my kind counsellor's advice, and got myself a little mattress, which could be folded up and stowed away during the daytime—it was made of thick felt, and covered with canvas, and no thicker than a pancake—and a pillow stuffed with wool, which seemed terribly hard at first till I got accustomed to it. Akím Akímytch took a great interest in getting all these various articles for me, and even made me with his own hands a blanket which consisted entirely of small pieces of old jackets and trousers which I had bought from the other convicts. The clothes were also provided by the Government, and expected to last a certain time—jackets

and trousers one year, and fur coats three years. At the expiration of this term, the suit becomes the property of the convict, who immediately sells it to the highest bidder in the prison. Even the most ragged suit of clothes, which a beggar would be ashamed to wear, is sure to find a purchaser.

CHAPTER VI.

MY FIRST MONTH IN THE PRISON.

I was not altogether without money when I arrived at the prison. I did not carry a large sum about me for fear of its being stolen, but I had a few rouble-notes hidden in the lining of the cover of my New Testament. Both the book and the money had been given me in Tobólsk by fellow-sufferers who were dragging out a weary life far from their home and those that had been dear to their hearts. There are, and ever will be in Siberia, persons who have devoted their whole life to doing good to convict prisoners. They care for them as they would for their own children, and try to lighten their burden in every possible way. I cannot help mentioning here one instance of the kind which has come under my own personal notice.

In the town where our prison was there lived a widowed lady, called Nasstássya Ivanovna, whose whole life had been devoted to succouring and helping the exiles. We did not know her personally while we were convict prisoners, but she seemed to have taken a special fancy to us without even knowing us; and many were the kind messages this good soul

contrived to send us. I sometimes wondered if perhaps a member of her own family, or some other person who may have been dear to her, had suffered in a similar way, and whether it was for the sake of him that she was so good and kind to us. After leaving the prison, on the eve of my departure for another town, I called on her to express my gratitude for all her kindness. She was living somewhere on the outskirts of the town in the house of a near relative. If I were asked to describe Nasstássya Ivanovna—to say if she were young or old, plain or handsome, clever or stupid—I am afraid that I could not do it, for she belonged to that class of persons of whom it is as difficult to say what they are as what they are not. But there was about her an atmosphere of love and peace which soothed us and did us good after the long years we had spent in a place and among people where love and peace were almost unknown words. She hardly ever took her eyes from us, laughed when we laughed, took the greatest interest in all we said, and bustled about to get us the best her house could offer, for she was poor. Tea was presently brought in, and quite a substantial meal provided. When we rose to take leave—a former fellow-prisoner had accompanied me in my visit—she disappeared for a moment, and reappeared with two cigar-cases in her hand. She had made them herself of cardboard, poor soul (and very badly too), and covered them with coloured paper not unlike that which is generally used for the binding of arithmetic books in village schools—for aught I know she may have used an old arithmetic book

for the purpose. Both cases were ornamented with a thin border of gilt paper which she had perhaps bought on purpose.

'I know that you smoke cigarettes, and I thought that perhaps you might be able to make use of this trifle,' said she timidly, as if she were presuming too much in making us a present. I have often heard it said, and read too, that the highest love for our neighbour is in reality nothing but egotism, yet I fail to see wherein egotism showed itself in this instance.

Although I had brought only a small sum of money with me, I could not find it in my heart to refuse the convicts who, in the course of the first day, came repeatedly to borrow small sums of money from me. Still I felt vexed with myself for allowing them to cheat me in the most barefaced manner, as I thought then, and still more for having made myself the laughing-stock of the whole prison when it was most important that I should at once take my position in the place. I suddenly found myself in a totally new sphere, among strange people who did not know me and whom I did not know, with whom I had nothing in common and never could have. What were our relations to be? Would I ever meet with a congenial spirit among them? Could I hope to find a friend?

With such and similar thoughts haunting my brain day and night, it is not to be wondered at that I began to feel inexpressibly sad and dejected. In vain did I try to rouse myself and shake off my sadness by forcing myself to attend to the numerous little household arrangements which it was necessary

to make in order to make life less hard in the prison, and in which Akím Akímytch had volunteered to help me. 'I am buried alive,' I used sometimes to say to myself, standing on the steps of our prison in the dusk of the early evening, and watching the convicts who had come home from their work and were loitering about in the courtyard or hanging idly about the kitchens. As I watched them wistfully I tried to read their characters and individual dispositions in their features and movements. Some looked cross and sullen, while others were merrily laughing and cracking jokes with their neighbours. These two types, the serious and the merry ones, are most commonly met with in the convict prisons. Some quarrelled, and others talked quietly with each other; some walked up and down apart from the rest, looking thoughtful or tired and apathetic, while others swaggered about with their caps jauntily set on one side and their fur coats thrown loosely over their shoulders. 'So this is to be my world henceforth,' thought I, 'in which I must live for many years to come.' I tried at first to get Akím Akímytch to tell me all about the convicts—their dispositions, temperaments, etc., at our afternoon tea-parties. During the first weeks of my life in the prison I lived almost entirely on tea, and frequently invited Akím Akímytch to share the contents of my teapot. He never refused my invitations, and invariably took it upon himself to boil the water in our own funny little tin samovar, which had been manufactured in the prison and lent me by M——. When I had poured him out his glass of tea (Akím Akímytch was

the fortunate possessor of a couple of glasses), he always sipped it in deep silence and with great propriety; then set the tumbler down and immediately began to stitch away with great vigour at my counterpane. But he could not tell me what I wanted to know, nor could he at all understand why I should take such an interest in the convicts, and listened to my questions with a curious smile which I well remember. 'I see it is of no use asking questions,' thought I, 'and I suppose I had better try and find out for myself what I want to know.'

Early on the fourth morning after my arrival in the prison the convicts were as usual drawn up in two rows in the little square in front of the guard-room by the gates. Both facing them and behind them stood soldiers with loaded guns. A soldier is authorised to fire at a convict if the latter attempts to escape or in a case of open mutiny, but is at the same time responsible for his shot. The head engineer arrived with his staff and the soldiers who superintended our work. The roll was called; the convict prisoners who worked in the tailor's workshop were sent away first, then the workmen *par excellence* dispersed about the different workshops, and the rest were sent to do various little jobs. Twenty men, myself included, were sent down to the river which flowed behind the fortress to break up two old barges which belonged to the Government and were frozen in, that the wood might not be wasted. As the country was richly wooded, and fuel was sold at a nominal price, a few pieces more or less of rotten timber could hardly make much difference in the

economical arrangements of the prison, and the whole job seemed to be merely a pretext to keep us busy. This the men knew, and went about their work in a listless way, very different from the eagerness with which they worked at a job that offered more interest, especially if it was to be finished by a certain time. In such cases they seemed to grow quite excited over their task, and often would exert themselves to their utmost to finish it in a shorter time than had been allotted to them, not for the sake of the profit, for profit there was none for them, but because their self-love was touched.

It was a mild, foggy winter day; the air was so warm that the snow had begun to melt in some places. Our chains rattled and jingled as we went down by the banks of the river. Two or three men went to fetch the necessary tools, and I walked on with the others, feeling less low-spirited than I had felt for some time past, and wondering what hard labour was like and how I was going to do it for the first time in my life. I remember every little incident that happened on this morning, which was my first day of hard labour. On the road we met a tradesman with a long beard, who stopped and put his hand in his pocket. A convict detached himself from us, and taking off his cap ran up to him, gratefully received the charitable contribution, five copecks, and came back to us. The man crossed himself and went on his way. The five copecks were spent in kalatchi which the convicts bought and divided among themselves.

Some of my comrades walked along in silence, looking surly and unhappy, others seemed indifferent

to what was going on, and a few chatted among themselves. One convict was in very high spirits, singing and dancing and jingling his chains at every jump. His name was Skourátoff, and he was the same man who on the first morning after my arrival in the prison had quarrelled with another for daring to assert that he, the other one, was a gaol-bird. Finally he struck up a ditty the first lines of which ran thus,

> They married me while I was away,
> When I had gone to the mill.

'There now, what is he howling about?' reproachfully remarked one convict, who, by the way, had no business to make any remarks whatever.

'The wolf knows but one song, and the people of Toúla have learnt it from him,' remarked another, with a strong Little-Russian accent.

'There's no harm in coming from Toúla,' retorted Skourátoff, 'but I have been told that you were nearly choked with dumplings in Poltáva.'

'That's a cursed lie. Didn't you eat your shtshi with a wooden shœ, you son of a dog?'

'And now he looks as if the devil himself were feeding him with cannon-balls,' added a third.

'My dear brothers, I have been brought up very delicately in my youth,' answered Skourátoff, with a slight sigh, as if his bringing-up were rather a grievance to him, and addressing the whole party. 'Ever since I was a baby I have been fed on prunes and Prussian rolls; my brothers have a shop in Moscow, in Passingby Street, and sell wind. They are the richest merchants I know.'

'And what have you been trading with?'

'Oh, various things. I had two hundred given me about that time.'

'Roubles?' interrupted an inquisitive listener, catching his breath at the mere thought of so much money.

'No, dear friend, they were lashes, not roubles.'

'Loúka, hallo there—Loúka, I say.'

'Others may call me Loúka if they please, but I shall be much obliged to you if you will call me Loúka Kousmítch,' retorted rather sharply a thin convict with a peaked nose.

'Very well, Loúka Kousmítch, if you like it better, and go to the devil!'

'I'm not Loúka Kousmítch for you. If you want to speak to me, you must call me grandfather.'

'Oh, go to the devil with your titles and grandfathers. I shan't waste any more words on you. I wanted to tell you something that would have amused you, though, but you put it clean out of my head. You see, brethren, it so happened that I did not stay long in Moscow. I had fifteen lashes with the knout given me, and was sent here. And then——'

'But what did they send you here for?' interrupted another, who had been listening attentively.

'You see, brethren, if you want to get rich in a short time you had better not drink and gamble. But I did so want to be a rich man, and you see to what it has brought me!'

This was said in such a comically plaintive tone that some of the men began to laugh. Skourátoff evidently belonged to that class of good-humoured

fellows who seem to consider it their duty to amuse their gloomy fellow-men, and get nothing but abuse for their pains.

'You had better take care of yourself, and not go too near a wood, for you might be mistaken for a sable and killed some day,' observed Loúka Kousmítch ironically. I suppose your coat alone cost as much as a hundred roubles.'

Skourátoff was attired in a wretched old fur coat which was covered with patches of all sizes and colours. He examined it attentively, but without displaying great emotion.

'If my coat is shabby, my head is very precious, brothers,' replied he. 'When I left Moscow I felt so grateful to know that my poor little head was going with me. Farewell, Moscow, many thanks for the hot bath you gave me, and the stripes on my back. You have no business to be looking at my coat, dear friend.'

'Would you like me to look at your head instead?'

''Tain't his own head,' remarked Loúka Kousmítch again. 'He asked for a head as he marched through Tyumén with his party, and some one gave him this one for Christ's sake.'[1]

'Did you ever learn a trade, Skourátoff?'

'Oh, to be sure he did,' remarked a surly-looking fellow in a gruff voice. 'He knows how to catch greenhorns and pick their pockets, depend upon that.'

[1] I.e. as he would give to a beggar. Russian beggars always ask for alms for 'Christ's sake.'

'I did try to make a pair of boots once,' replied Skourátoff, without noticing the bitter remark.

'Did any one buy them?'

'Oh, yes; there was one man who did not fear God and honour his parents. So the Lord punished him by sending him to buy the boots that I had made.'

An explosion of laughter greeted this last sally.

'And then I once mended a pair of boots since I came here,' Skourátoff continued coolly, 'for Lieutenant Stepan Fédorytch Pomórtzeff.'

'Was he pleased with them?'

'I am sorry to say, my little brethren, that he was not. He swore at me, and even kicked me. Bless my soul, what a passion he was in! Alackaday, what a queer thing life is after all!

'Wait a moment, stop a moment,
Akoulina's husband's coming,'

sang he merrily, jumping up and down.

'Stupid fool,' growled the Little-Russian, casting at him a look of ineffable disgust.

'He is a useless creature,' gravely remarked another.

I was rather puzzled why they should be vexed with Skourátoff for being merry, and why all the men who seemed to be of a more cheerful disposition than the rest should be bullied and abused by them. My first thought, naturally enough, was that the Little-Russian had a personal grudge against Skourátoff. But I soon convinced myself that there was nothing of the kind, and that poor Skourátoff's only fault lay in a lack of personal dignity which was *de*

rigueur in the prison. That was the reason why they called him a 'useless creature.' All those who were like Skourátoff, good-humoured and afraid of giving offence, were most unmercifully bullied and abused by the others, while some who combined a cheerful disposition with a ready tongue, and never allowed themselves to be attacked without making their adversary smart for it by some cutting answer which turned the laugh against him, were sure to be respected and perhaps slightly feared by the rest.

By this time we had reached the banks of the river. The old barges which we were to break up lay frozen in at our feet. Beyond, on the opposite bank, the white steppe stretched far away. It was altogether a dreary, desolate view which seemed calculated to fill the heart with that strange feeling of intense yearning which the sight of a vast plain always awakens in us. I had expected that the convicts would rush down to their work at once, but was mistaken. Some sat down on logs of wood which lay about on the ground, and almost every one drew from his boots a pouch with Siberian tobacco, which was sold at three copecks a pound, and short wooden pipes which they had made themselves, and began to smoke. The soldiers who escorted us formed a chain around us and began to watch us, looking excessively bored.

'I wonder what they are going to do with this rotten timber,' remarked one of the men in an undertone, as if talking to himself.

'They must be badly off for fuel.'

'I expect they are,' lazily answered another.

'Where are those peasants going?' asked the first, after a pause. He had not even heard the answer to his remark, and was pointing to a party of peasants who were walking in single file across the snow at some distance. The men turned lazily round in that direction, and not having anything better to do for the moment began to ridicule them. The last man in the file walked rather in a peculiar fashion, stretching out his arms and holding his head, which was adorned by a tall fur cap, very much on one side. His whole figure stood out clearly against the white snow.

'Doesn't brother Petróvitch look quite a swell,' remarked one of the convicts, mimicking the peasant's dialect. I have often noticed that convicts despise the peasants, and look down upon them, although more than one-half of them have been peasants themselves.

'The last man looks as if he were going to sow horse-radish,' observed another.

'He is bowed down by many cares, for he is rich,' said a third.

Here all the men laughed lazily. A woman came up with a basket of kalatchi for sale. The five copecks were immediately invested in the favourite delicacy, which was divided and eaten on the spot.

A young fellow, who sold kalatchi in the prison, bought a score of them, and tried to persuade the woman to let him have three kalatchi out of ten, instead of one. But she remained inflexible.

'Let me have that one too,' pleaded the youth.

'Is there anything else you want?' retorted she.

'Yes, all the kalatchi that grow so stale, because you can't sell them, that the mice won't eat them.'

'Oh, you wretch!' And the woman shrieked with laughter.

At last the subaltern officer whose duty it was to superintend our work, made his appearance, stick in hand.

'Hallo there, what do you mean by sitting down instead of working? Get up at once!' shouted he.

'Give us a task, if you please, Ivan Matveitch,' said one of the leaders, rising slowly to his feet.

'Why did you not ask for a task when you were sent here? Pull the barge to pieces, there's a task for you.'

After a good deal of hesitation the men at last condescended to rise, and went down slowly to the river. Two or three men immediately took the lead, and began to issue orders right and left which nobody obeyed. It had been decided that the barge was not to be chopped up into small pieces of wood, but that the planks were to be saved as much as possible, which gave more work, especially as they were fastened to the ribs of the boat with large iron nails.

'I suppose we had better take this piece of wood off first. Come here, boys,' called out one of the convicts who had hitherto remained in the background, putting his arms round a large piece of wood and waiting for help. But no help came.

'Oh, you are going to do it all, are you? You'll never do it, and if your grandfather the old bear were here, he couldn't do it either,' growled some one.

'But how am I to begin, brothers? I really don't

know,' replied the man, letting the piece of wood go, and standing up.

'You cannot finish the whole job by yourself, and you might as well have stayed where you were.'

'He has not wits enough about him to feed three hens, and he wants to teach us. The dolt!'

'But what have I done, brothers,' remonstrated the poor wretch; 'I only thought——'

'I suppose you had better be wrapped up in brown paper and set aside; or would you like me to pickle you for next winter?' shouted the sub, who had been standing by while all this bickering was going on, and feeling a little bewildered at the sight of twenty stalwart men who did not know how to pull a barge to pieces. 'Be quick, will you.'

'We can't do anything quicker than quick, Ivan Matveitch!'

'You, at any rate, don't seem to be doing anything at all! Hallo, there, Savélyeff, what are you standing there for, staring as if you wanted to sell your eyes to the highest bidder? Set about it at once!'

'But I can't do everything myself.'

'Do give us a task, Ivan Matveitch.'

'I have said *no* once, and I am not going to do it. Pull the barge to pieces and then go home.'

After much further deliberation the men at last made up their minds to work, but they set about it in such a sleepy, lazy way, that I really felt vexed at seeing a crowd of strong healthy men work with so little energy. Hardly had they begun to remove the first plank when it broke in two. However, they

assured the sub that they could not have helped it, and that the whole thing must be done in a different way altogether. A long consultation then ensued, and as the discussion warmed they very nearly came to blows. The sub flourished his stick wildly and swore at them again, but another plank was smashed. It was discovered next that we were short of instruments, and two convicts, escorted by a soldier, went off to the fortress in search of them, while the rest sat down on the barge, calmly took out their pipes, and began to smoke again.

At last the sub lost all patience. 'Well, I don't think that you will ever be short of work—I never saw such lazy people in all my life!—never, never, never;' and he marched back to the fortress flourishing his stick and grumbling.

An hour later the 'conductor' arrived. He listened quietly to what the convicts had to say, and told them that he was going to set them a task. They were to take out four more planks without breaking them, and pull the greater part of the barge to pieces, when they might go home. The task was by no means an easy one; but the men set about it with wonderful alacrity, and half an hour before the drum sounded for going home they were on their way back to the prison, tired out with their morning's labour, but as happy as children, having succeeded in gaining half an hour. There was one thing which had struck me in their behaviour towards me this morning. I seemed to be always getting in their way, and every offer to help them was refused with harsh and unkind words. Even a miserable, ragged wretch, who

never dared to open his mouth in the presence of others who were cleverer than he, abused me when I happened to come too near him, under pretext that I was in his way. At last one of the men said to me, in a gruff voice, 'What do you want here? Go away. You have no business to be here.'

'He is in a bag, and does not know how to get out of it,' remarked another.

'You had better get a tin cup,' added a third, 'and go and beg like a blind man's dog, instead of hanging about here.'

So I was obliged to step aside and look on while they worked; but their petty persecutions did not stop even when they had gained their end and driven me out of their midst. I had hardly stood aside for a moment, when some one cried, pointing to me, 'That's the kind of workman they send to help us! Did you ever see such a pack of lazy dogs?'

All this was of course done on purpose, as nothing could please them better than to torture and persecute a gentleman.

The reader will understand why almost the first question that I had ventilated in my mind on entering the prison had been what would be my position with regard to the other convicts, and how I should behave towards them. I did not know then, nor did I learn till a long time after, that if I had prided myself on my gentle birth, despised them for being plebeians, and given myself airs, they would have respected me much more than they did, for then I should have been a perfect gentleman, according to

their ideas. They would no doubt have sneered at me and abused me still, but for all that I should have answered to their conception of a gentleman. Again, if I had tried to flatter them, to win their favour by cringing before them, become hand and glove with them, they would have at once suspected me of cowardice, and despised me still more. On the other hand, I did not like to follow the example of the Poles, my fellow-sufferers, who had assumed towards them that tone of icy politeness which is so intensely galling and irritating. I knew very well that they despised me because I wanted to work like one of them, and did not give myself airs; and though I was sure that in due time they would be obliged to change their opinion about me, still I could not help feeling grieved at the thought that they almost had a right to despise me now, for was I not in their eyes trying to curry favour with them by working like one of them?

That same afternoon, when I returned home after finishing my task, I felt terribly sad and low-spirited. I shuddered at the thought of the long dreary years that were in store for me, of the thousands of days which would be exactly like one another, and probably like the one I had just passed. I was wandering about in the yard absorbed in my gloomy reflections, when I suddenly beheld our Shárik running to meet me. Shárik was our prison dog; he had lived in the convict prison since time immemorial, belonged to no one in particular, looked upon every one of us individually as his master, and subsisted chiefly on broken meat and garbage. He was of

common breed, black with white spots, with good clever eyes, and had a beautiful bushy tail. Nobody had ever petted the poor creature or cared for him till I came. I am naturally fond of dogs, and on the first day of my arrival I had stroked him and given him a piece of bread. The dog stood perfectly still while I stroked him, looking at me lovingly with his deep brown eyes, softly wagging his tail in sign of pleasure. To-night Shárik had been looking for me everywhere, and when at last he caught sight of me in my dusky corner behind the prison he came up at full speed, whining with joy. I cannot tell how it happened, but when I took his head between my hands and kissed it tenderly, the dog put both paws on my shoulders and began to lick my face. 'Heaven has sent me a friend,' thought I; and all through that terrible time, when I felt so lonely and wretched, I used to look forward every night to our meeting in the yard, in the little dark corner behind the prison. I always went there as soon as we came in, followed by poor Shárik, who was leaping and whining with joy, and then, when we were quite alone, I would take his head in my hands and kiss it passionately, while at the same time a sweet sad feeling filled my heart. And I remember that I used to feel even a kind of secret exultation at the thought that there was only one being left in the whole world who really cared for me—my faithful dog Shárik.

CHAPTER VII.

I MAKE NEW FRIENDS.—PETRÓFF.

As the time wore on, and days expanded into weeks, and weeks into months, I began to feel more at home in my new life. I no longer wondered at my companions or my surroundings. I knew that happiness was out of the question for me, but I had made up my mind to face my fate with resignation, and bear it I would. Whatever doubts and misgivings still lurked in my heart I tried resolutely to put away from me, and I am happy to say I succeeded in my efforts. I no longer wandered about the prison absorbed in my grief, and unable to think of anything else except my misery. The curious looks of the convicts no longer followed me wherever I went. To my great relief they had at last grown accustomed to seeing me there. I felt at home in the convict prison, knew my place on the pallet, and had gradually got used to things that had appeared to me unbearable at first.

It was the custom in the prison to have one's head shaved regularly once a week, for which purpose we were summoned by turns into the guard-room every Saturday afternoon, where the regimental

barbers lathered our heads with cold water and soap, and scraped them mercilessly with the bluntest of razors. The very thought of this torture makes my flesh creep while I am writing about it. Happily, however, I did not have to suffer long, as Akím Akímytch introduced me to a convict who shaved with his own razor for a copeck a head, and made quite a living out of it. Many of the convicts patronised his establishment rather than give themselves up to the barbers, though they were by no means very delicate. Our barber had been nicknamed Major, why I know not, for he was not in the least like our Major. While I am writing this the image of the Barber-major rises vividly before me—a tall, gaunt, stupid fellow, of an exceedingly taciturn disposition, whose soul seemed perfectly swallowed up in his work. He always carried a strop in his hand, on which he kept whetting his razor day and night, and evidently considered shaving as the sole object and aim of his life. A—— once got into a terrible scrape in one of his conversations with our Major by speaking of our barber by his nickname. The Major flew into a violent rage. 'Don't you know what a major is, you scoundrel?' roared he, foaming with passion, and kicking A——, as was his wont on such occasions. 'Don't you know what a major is? You cur of a convict, how dare you call a convict a major to my very face?'

I do not think that any one except A—— could ever have got on with a brute like our Major.

From the first day that I entered the prison I had begun to think of the time when I should again

be free, and it was my favourite occupation to calculate in different ways when my sentence would have expired. In fact I could hardly think of anything else, and am persuaded that every one in my position would have done the same thing. I do not know if my fellow-prisoners counted the days as I did; still, I must confess that I was much struck by the buoyancy and wildness of their hopes. All people do not hope alike—e.g. a prisoner in a convict prison and a free man. The latter has always a distinct object in view, in hoping, e.g., a change in his outward circumstances or the fulfilment of some desire; but at the same time his mind and body may be actively employed, and the very cares of life often prevent him from becoming too much absorbed in his hopes. The prisoner, it is true, is also actively employed; but he works and lives in a prison, and whatever his sin may have been, and however well deserved his punishment is, he instinctively demurs against accepting his sentence as his final destiny. The convict persists in looking upon his cell as a temporary abode where he is not, and cannot be, at home. Twenty years of penal servitude dwindle away into a mere nothing in his eyes, and he fully believes that he will leave the prison at fifty-five feeling as young and strong as he does now at thirty-five. 'I shall enjoy my life yet,' thinks he, and resolutely puts away whatever doubts and unpleasant thoughts about the future may arise in his soul. Even those poor wretches who were in the 'Special Department,' and had been sentenced to penal servitude for life, had not given up hoping. For might not some day or other there come an order from St. Petersburg to

send them to the mines in Nertchinsk for a certain number of years. Would not that be a delightful change. It took nearly six months to get to Nertchinsk, and then it is always more pleasant to travel with a large party than to be shut up in the convict prison! And when their term had expired in Nertchinsk, why then——. I have known many an old man with grey hairs solace himself with similar dreams. I remember seeing once in Toból'sk some prisoners who were chained to the wall by a chain seven feet long. This is only done in extreme cases, when some horrible crime has been committed, in Siberia. Some are chained to their wall for five years, others for ten. One among them apparently belonged to the upper classes, and had been a Tchinovnik somewhere in his better days. He spoke in a soft, low voice with a sweet smile, and showed us his chains and how he managed to lie down comfortably on his bed. I have often wondered since what crime he could have committed. As a rule, prisoners of this class behave themselves very well and seem satisfied with their position, though they look forward impatiently to the time when their sentence will have expired. Will they regain their liberty then? By no means; but they will be allowed to leave the dull gloomy prison cell with its low brick vaults, and to walk up and down in the prison yard and have a little fresh air. That is all. For they know full well that they must spend the rest of their life in chains and in prison till death sets them free. Yet they count the days when they will no longer be chained to the wall, for if this punishment were to

be endless, could they bear it without dying of despair or going mad?

I felt that the terrible moral depression which weighed on me day and night, the constant jarring to which my nerves were exposed, and the bad air of the cells, would irretrievably ruin my health in a very short time, unless I used all my energy to counteract these evil influences. The only way to do this and to strengthen my body was to work hard. I resolved to spend as much time in the open air as possible, to tire myself out physically every day, and to accustom myself to carry heavy weights, so as to leave the prison strong and healthy. And I was right. Work and exercise saved me from a premature old age, and kept me from wasting slowly away like one of my comrades, a gentleman by birth like myself. We had entered the prison together. He was then a handsome young man in the prime of life; he left it a grey-haired asthmatic old man who had lost the use of his legs. 'No,' said I to myself, looking at him, 'I will live, and live I shall.' For a long time my passion for working made me the object of endless sarcasms and biting remarks from my fellow-prisoners; but I resolutely remained deaf to all they said, and worked away bravely. Almost the first thing I learned to do was to burn and grind alabaster, which is very easy work. The director of the engineering department did whatever was in his power to spare us. This was by no means a special favour, but common justice, as it would be ridiculous to expect an individual who is possessed of only half the physical strength of a working-man, and has never worked in

his life, to get through the same task in the same time as the latter. However, he did not succeed always in 'spoiling' us, and had often to do it as it were by stealth, for we were too closely watched, and had frequently to work twice as hard as the other workmen. Three or four of us, mostly old or weak men, were generally sent to burn alabaster under the superintendence of a convict who knew the work thoroughly. For many years we worked under the direction of one Almásoff, a bony, gloomy-looking man with a very dark complexion. He abhorred talking so much that, although he despised us from the bottom of his soul, he never took the trouble to swear at us. The shed where we worked stood in a lonely spot by the river-side. Nothing could be more dreary, especially on a dark winter's day, than the view of the river and its opposite banks. There was something intensely melancholy in that wild and desolate landscape. But it seemed still worse on a bright day, when the sun shone on the white snow. At such times I always felt an irrepressible longing to fly away into this boundless steppe, which began on the other side of the river and stretched towards the south for about fifteen hundred versts. Almásoff used to set about his work in a gloomy silence which never failed to impress us with a sense of our own helplessness and inability to work. He invariably declined our offers of help, and made a great show of doing everything himself. It is true that all his labours consisted in making a fire in the oven where the alabaster which we brought in was burned. The next day the alabaster was taken out again; we each

provided ourselves with a hammer, put some alabaster into a box, and set to work with a goodwill. I was very fond of this work. The brittle alabaster turned into dazzling white powder under the strokes of our hammers, which we swung lustily till we felt hot and exhausted. We always felt better at such times; the blood seemed to flow more rapidly through our veins. Even Almásoff would relent occasionally, and smoke his pipe with a more condescending air, though he could not help growling at us when he was obliged to say something. I must say to his justification that it never made any difference with him whether he spoke to his equals or to us—he was equally unpleasant to everybody, though after all I do not think that he was a bad man.

Occasionally I used to be sent to the turner's workshop to turn the fly-wheel. This was no easy job, and it took a great deal of strength to turn it, especially when the turner was working at some large object, such as the leg of a table. As one man could hardly have managed it by himself, I was sent with another gentleman, a certain B——, to do the work, and for many a year we turned that wheel together. B—— was a puny, delicate young man, who suffered a good deal from his weak lungs. He had come a year before me, together with two other gentlemen. One was an old man, who spent his nights and days in prayer (to the great admiration of the other convicts), and who died in my time; the other was a youth, almost a boy, who had carried B—— on his back for the last seven hundred versts, as the latter was too much exhausted to walk.

They were intimate friends. B—— was a highly-educated, noble, generous-minded man, whose beautiful disposition had unfortunately been much soured by ill-health.

Another kind of work of which I was very fond was shovelling snow. In winter time, when the snow-storms lasted sometimes for twenty-four hours, it frequently happened that the houses were half buried in the snow. When the storm was over and the sun came out again, we were sent out in large parties to shovel the snow away from the Government buildings. A tremendous task was appointed us; we each had a shovel given us, and we all set to work unanimously, thrusting our shovels deep into the soft fresh snow, which had hardly had time to freeze on its surface, and throwing it over our shoulders in huge white lumps, which turned into a silvery dust as they fell. The fresh wintry air and the exercise always had an exhilarating effect on the men. They laughed and shouted, threw snowballs at each other till the air grew thick with flying masses of snow, and the more sensible members of the party put a stop to the proceedings, and the whole thing ended in a violent quarrel.

By this time the circle of my acquaintances had gradually increased. To tell the truth, I had done very little towards extending it, for I still felt restless and indisposed to talk; but, somehow or other, my friends seemed to spring up around me like mushrooms. The first who called on me was a convict named Petróff. I have put a special emphasis on the words 'called on me,' because Petróff lived in

the Special Department at the other end of the prison. There could be very little in common between us to all appearances, and still Petróff seemed to consider it his duty to pay me a visit nearly every night in my cell, or to exchange a few words with me during my leisure time, when I used to walk up and down behind the prison, trying to escape for a time at least the curious glances of my fellow-convicts. At first I thought him rather a bore, but he managed so cleverly that his visits became quite a pleasant diversion to me, although he was not a great talker and rather reticent than otherwise. He was below middle stature, but of strong build, and very quick and even graceful in his movements. His face was pale, and might have been called handsome had his cheekbones been less high. His eyes had a curiously defiant look, his teeth were very small and white, and he always had a pinch of snuff between his gums and under-lip—putting snuff into their mouths was a habit with many convicts. He was forty years old, but looked ten years younger. There was something excessively refined in his manner towards me; if he thought that I wished to be alone, he would perhaps talk to me for two or three minutes, when he would take his leave, thanking me for my kindness. This was, of course, a delicate attention which he never paid to any one else in the prison. We continued on the same footing for many years, never becoming more intimate, although he was sincerely attached to me. I have often wondered since what could have attracted him to me so as to make him visit me every day. He hardly ever borrowed money

from me, and although he subsequently stole several of my things, he seemed to do this rather *en passant*, without any premeditated intention on his part. I hardly can tell why I always felt as if he did not live in the same prison as me, but somewhere else, in another house, in the town, and only came in occasionally to see how we were all getting on and to hear the latest news. He always seemed to be in a hurry, as if he had made an appointment with somebody to meet him somewhere, or had left something unfinished, and yet there was nothing bustling about him. There was, as I have said before, a curious look in his eyes, half-daring and half-sarcastic, but he always seemed to be looking at something far beyond the object that happened to be nearest to him. This peculiarity gave him often an absent expression. I sometimes tried to find out whither he hurried off after speaking to me, and if any one expected him anywhere. But all I could discover was that he rushed away either into another cell or the kitchen, and if there happened to be any conversation going on he would sit down beside one of the men, listen attentively, sometimes even put in a word himself, get quite excited, and then suddenly stop short and lapse into silence. But whether he talked or was silent he always seemed to be ready to start up at a moment's notice and run to the place where he was wanted.

He never worked for himself after finishing his daily task, for he knew no trade, and consequently never had any money. What could we two find to talk about? His conversation was of as peculiar a

type as he himself was. Thus, for instance, he would catch sight of me as I was walking about moodily behind the prison, and suddenly wheel round and come up to me. He always walked very fast, and had a peculiar habit of turning round sharply.

'Good afternoon.'

'Good afternoon.'

'I hope I have not disturbed you?'

'No.'

'I wanted to ask you about Napoleon. Is he not related to that Napoleon who was here in 1812?' Petróff had been educated in a Government school for the sons of soldiers, and could read and write.

'Yes.'

'I want to ask what they mean by calling him the President?'

Whenever he asked any questions, he always did it in a sharp nervous manner, as if he were bent on getting as much information as possible on a highly important subject which brooked no delay.

I explained to him Napoleon's position as well as I could, adding that he might perhaps some day become Emperor of the French.

'How is this?'

I explained this also. Petróff listened attentively, and even inclined his head towards me to show how interested he was.

'H'm, h'm! I want to ask you something, Alexander Petróvitch. Is it true that there are monkeys who have such long arms that they touch their heels with their hands, and who are as tall as the tallest man?'

'Yes; there are such monkeys.'

'I should like to know all about them.'

I described these interesting animals to him to the best of my abilities.

'Where do they live?'

'In the hot countries. There are some on the Island of Sumatra.'

'That's in America, is it not? I have been told that the people there walk on their heads.'

'I suppose you mean the antipodes.' I told him all I knew about America and the antipodes, while he listened as attentively as if he had come only to hear about the latter.

'Aha, I read a book last year about the Countess Lavallière. Arefjeff borrowed it from the Aide-de-camp. It's Dumas's. Can you tell me if it is a true story?'

'No; it is fiction.'

'Well, good-bye. Thank you very much.' And Petróff disappeared; and our next conversation was the exact repetition of this one.

I began to feel quite an interest in Petróff, and tried to find out more about him. M——, hearing of our acquaintance, warned me at once not to become too intimate with him, adding, that although he had been afraid of many of the convicts at first, still not one of them, not even Gásin, had produced on him such a terrible impression as Petróff. 'He is the most energetic and fearless of all the convicts here,' said he, 'and is capable of doing anything. Nothing can prevent him from carrying out his plans. He will cut your throat, should he feel in-

clined to do so, and never even feel sorry for it afterwards. I sometimes can't help thinking that he must be mad.' M——'s definition of Petróff's disposition could not fail to interest me very much, though I was rather disappointed when I found that he was after all unable to account for his opinion of him. Strange to say, although I have known him for years, during which hardly a day passed without our having a little confabulation together, and although I never knew him do anything positively wrong, yet every time we talked together I could not help feeling that after all M—— was right. I have never been able to analyse this feeling clearly myself. I must add that Petróff was the convict who, as I have related, intended to kill our Major when he was being led out to be flogged, and that the former was only saved by a miracle, through leaving the prison before the execution began. I heard that Petróff had been sent to the convict prison for stabbing his colonel. The latter had struck him one day while they were drilling. Undoubtedly Petróff had been struck many a time before; but this happened to be once too often, and he killed his officer on the spot, in the presence of the whole battalion. I do not know the particulars of his story, for he never told me. He seldom quarrelled with any one, but he never made friends, with the exception, perhaps, of Sirótkin, though their friendship was by no means a very constant one, and only reached its climax when he wanted the latter to do something for him. Once, only once, I saw him in a passion. He was quarrelling about some rags with another convict, called Vassíly

Antónoff. His antagonist was a civil prisoner, a tall, herculean man, with a sarcastic, quarrelsome disposition, and no coward. They had been quarrelling for some time, and I supposed that if it came to the worst they might not unlikely come to blows, knowing that Petróff could at times swear and fight like the very worst of the convicts. But I was mistaken. Petróff suddenly turned pale; his lips began to tremble and grew white, he breathed with difficulty, and rising from his seat, he went slowly up to Antónoff, stepping noiselessly with his bare feet (he always went barefoot in summer). The other convicts, who had been talking and laughing among themselves, suddenly grew silent; you might have heard a pin fall. Everybody was eager to see what would happen. Antónoff sprang to his feet, looking as white as a sheet. I left the room, expecting every moment to hear the shrieks of the murdered man. But the affair took an altogether different turn. Before Petróff had come up to Antónoff, the latter had flung down the object they were quarrelling about without saying a word. To do him justice, he did swear a little at Petróff a short time after, only just enough to clear his conscience, and to show that after all he was not afraid of him. But Petróff never took the slightest notice of his imprecations, and did not even deign to answer them, but picked up the rags with an air of great satisfaction. A quarter of an hour later he was, as usual, lounging about the prison in search of some interesting conversation in which he might join. He often reminded me of an able workman who, while waiting for a job, sits down to play

with a baby. I never could understand why he did not run away, as nothing would have prevented his so doing if he had once set his mind on doing it. A nature like his allows itself to be controlled by common sense only to a certain point, when some ardent desire takes the upper hand and carries everything before it. I am quite certain that he would have contrived his escape cleverly and deceived us all, had he so been minded, and he might even have existed without food for a week or more, hiding in the woods or in the rushes by the riverside. But evidently the possibility of escaping had never entered his mind yet, or perhaps he had never ardently longed for freedom. People like him are born into this world with one idea in their heads, which unconsciously drives them hither and thither all their lives till they find the work they are fitted for. Another source of wonderment to me was the meekness with which a man who had stabbed his colonel for striking him submitted to be flogged. He, like many other convicts who had no fixed occupation, used sometimes to smuggle liquor into the prison, and was consequently liable to be detected and punished. But whenever he lay down to be flogged he seemed to have made up his mind that it must be so, as he had deserved it fully. If this had not been the case, I doubt if any earthly power could have made him submit to punishment. Another curious trait in his character was a periodical mania for robbing me, which contrasted oddly enough with his professed attachment to me. One day, as I have said, he stole my Bible, which I had given him to carry. He had

only a few steps to go, but managed to sell it on the way, and spent the money in drink. I suppose he wanted liquor very much just then, and could not help it. The very same night he calmly informed me of the occurrence without the least feeling of contrition or embarrassment, as if it had been the most natural thing in the world to do. I tried to scold him, for the loss of my Bible was a serious matter to me. He listened quietly and patiently to my reproaches, fully agreed with me that the Bible is a useful book, felt very sorry that I should have been deprived of mine, but never expressed any regret at having stolen it. I cannot help thinking that he bore my reproaches so meekly because he was conscious of having deserved them, and thought it might do me good to vent my wrath on him, but that after all he was all the time wondering in his heart why I should make such a fuss about a trifle. I was in his eyes a mere baby, too innocent to understand even the most common thing in this world, and he took no pains to hide this opinion from me, for I frequently noticed that whenever I tried to lead the conversation on some other topic besides books and science, he invariably favoured me with the very shortest answers. I have often asked myself why he should feel such a warm interest in books and other learned subjects which generally formed the subject of our conversation. I even watched him to see if he were making fun of me, but he always listened very seriously, except that his face always bore that absent look which annoyed me sometimes. The questions he asked me were all put in a concise, dogma-

tical kind of way, yet he never seemed to feel much interested in the information he obtained. I suppose that he had made up his mind at once, without troubling himself much about it, that I was altogether different from other people, and therefore unable to appreciate any conversation which had no reference to books; and if so, what was the good of worrying me with other things?

I am sure that he loved me; but though this feeling could not prevent him from robbing me, I am certain that it furnished him with a plausible excuse for doing so, and even for being sorry for me all the time. 'Queer chap, can't even take care of his own goods!' I remember he once accidentally told me that I was 'too good-natured.' 'You are so green—so very green—that one can't help feeling sorry for you.' 'Excuse me for saying so, Alexander Petróvitch,' he added after a short silence; 'but I could not help telling you.'

CHAPTER VIII.

LOÚKA'S HISTORY.

ONE evening, soon after my arrival, I was lying wearily on my pallet. The convicts were either busy working for themselves or asleep. Two or three men were talking together, one of them seemed to be telling the other something. I listened involuntarily, and heard a curious tale about a murder which the narrator had committed some time ago. The narrator was Loúka Kausmítch, the short, thin, sharp-nosed young convict of whom I have already spoken. His parents were Russians, but he had been born on his master's estate in Little Russia, and prided himself on being a Khókhol, i.e. Little Russian. His face involuntarily reminded one of the proverb, 'A small bird has a sharp beak.' But convict prisoners seem to have a peculiar gift of reading a man's character, and in spite of Loúka's sharpness, and the pains he took to pass for a terrible criminal with an iron will, they despised him cordially, and took no pains to disguise their feelings. He was a shirt-maker by trade, and on this particular evening was busily engaged sewing a shirt. By his side sat Kobylin, a large, heavy-looking, but good-natured

fellow, whom Loúka patronised occasionally, but more frequently ordered about and snubbed, and scolded, and bullied, as if he were the master and Kobylin his serf. The drudge was knitting a worsted stocking listening to Loúka, who was narrating something in a very loud voice, evidently hoping to attract the attention of the rest, although to all appearance he was talking to his neighbour.

'You see, brother,' he was saying, 'I was being sent to Tch—— for begging.'

'How long ago is that?' asked Kobylin.

'It will be two years by the time the pease are ripe, I expect. We passed through K—— on our way to Tch——, and they put me into prison there for a short time. I found good company there, I can tell you—twelve Khokhly,[1] all fine fellows and every one of them as strong as a horse. But you never saw such milksops in your life—they were as meek as lambs, for they were starving. The food was bad, and their Major treated them like brutes and not like men. I soon saw through it all, and said to them one fine day, "Why do you give in to such a blockhead?"

'"You had better speak to him yourself," said they, and even laughed at me for daring to think of such a thing as opposing their Major. Well, I held my peace. There was such a queer Khókhol there, my brothers.' He suddenly interrupted his tale, and addressing the rest, went on. 'He used to tell us how he had remonstrated with the magistrates when they sent him to prison, and cried while he was telling

[1] Plural of Khókhol.

us, for he said he had a wife and children at home, poor fellow. He was a large fat old man with grey hair, and I think I hear him now repeating his conversation with the clerk: "Says I to him, 'No, no!' But that son of the devil would go on writing, writing! Says I to myself, May you be struck dead on the spot, or choke or die in some other way. But he goes on writing, writing, writing, and when he had done writing, it was all over with me." Give me another thread, Vassya. What wretched, bad stuff this thread is.'

'It was bought in the market,' replied Vassya, handing him a thread.

'Our thread is better. I sent the invalided soldier to buy some for me, and I wonder where he got this? I suppose at some wretched old woman's,' continued Loúka, threading his needle.

'I suppose she is an old friend of his.'

'I suppose she is.'

'But what about the Major?' interposed Kobylin, who had been forgotten during this dialogue.

Loúka had long been expecting to be reminded that he had not finished his tale. However, as it never does to appear too eager to speak about oneself, he pretended not to hear Kobylin's remark, but went on sewing in silence for a few minutes; then recrossing his legs (he was sitting cross-legged on his pallet) he continued his tale leisurely:

'At last I succeeded in rousing my Khókhly, and they sent for the Major to come and speak to them. I took the precaution of borrowing a knife from my neighbour, and hid it in my sleeve in case it should

be wanted. We heard that the Major had come, and I said to them, "Don't be frightened, boys. Speak up like men!" But bless them all! their soul had gone right down into their heels, and they shook with fear. In comes the Major, drunk of course.

'"What do you mean by sending for me! What in the devil's name is going on here?" shouts he. "Don't you know that I am your God and your Czar!"

'When he said "I am your God and your Czar," I stepped forward. There was the knife hidden in my sleeve.

'"I beg your pardon, most high-born one," said I, getting nearer and nearer to him as I spoke, "but you cannot be both God and the Czar?"

'"So you are the ringleader?" screams the Major.

'"No," says I, coming quite close to him, "most high-born one, I am no mutineer and no ringleader; but I dare say you know yourself that we have but one God, and that He is almighty and omnipresent, and we have but one Czar, whom God has placed over us. He is a monarch, most high-born one; and you are only a Major whom it has pleased the Czar to set over us."

'"What, what, what, what," my Major cackled like an old hen. I thought he was going to choke with rage.

'"Take that," says I, sticking the knife right into him. He tumbled down all of a heap, kicked a little, and it was all over. I threw the knife away, and said to the Khókhly, "Pick him up."'

'I expect you caught it,' coolly remarked Kobylin.

'H'm! I did catch it, I can tell you, brother. Hand me the scissors, Aleï. Why is there no maïdán going on to-night, brothers?'

'I suppose they have no money to go on with,' says Vassya. 'If they had some, we might have had one.'

'If! They give you a hundred roubles in Moscow for "ifs"!' said Loúka.

'How many lashes did you say you got, Loúka?' began Kobylin again.

'Only five hundred, dearest friend.' 'I very nearly died that time, brethren,' added Loúka, again ignoring Kobylin's presence. 'I had never been flogged with the knout before. It was terrible. The whole town had come to see how they would punish a murderer. Ugh, what blockheads those people were. Timosha[1] helped me to undress, laid me flat on a bench, and called out, "Look out!" I wondered what was going to happen. He struck the first blow; I tried to scream and opened my mouth, but not a sound could I utter, for I had lost my voice. After the second blow I fainted dead away, and never heard them even count *two*. Then I remember nothing till I heard seventeen. Why, they had to stop four times and let me rest half an hour, and pour cold water over me! There I sat staring at them all, and thinking that my end had come.'

'But it hadn't come after all?' asked Kobylin.

Loúka merely looked contemptuously at him. The rest burst out laughing.

[1] Cant for hangman or executioner.

'I fear there must be something very wrong here,' remarked Loúka, tapping his forehead with an injured air, as if he regretted having wasted so much time and strength on such a noodle.

'He is a queer chap,' affirmed Vassya.

Loúka had murdered six people in his life, and tried very hard to make the convicts believe that he was a terrible fellow, yet nobody feared him in the prison!

CHAPTER IX.

ISSAÏ FOMITCH—I TAKE A BATH—BAKLOUSHIN'S TALE.

CHRISTMAS DAY was approaching fast. Seeing my fellow-prisoners look forward to it so eagerly, I too caught myself hoping that some unforeseen event might come to pass. Four days before Christmas Day we were ordered to take a bath. In my time, and especially during the first years of my imprisonment, a bath was a luxury which we seldom enjoyed, and consequently everybody was delighted at the prospect, and set at once about making the necessary preparations with great glee. In honour of the event we had had a half-holiday given us, as we were to go down early in the afternoon. The busiest and happiest of all was Issaï Fomitch Bumstein, a Jewish convict, of whom I have already made mention in the fourth chapter of my memoirs. He was passionately fond of bathing, and used to get up on the highest shelf, where the steam was hottest, and bribe some one to beat him with birch twigs till he was nearly beside himself with the heat and excitement. Every time that I remember our bath-room—which, in fact, it would be most difficult to forget—the face and figure of my most worthy and never-to-be-forgot-

room-fellow Issaï Fomitch rises before me. I have already described him—a shrivelled, sharp-faced man of fifty. There was a curious expression of placid self-complacency on his face, which nothing seemed ever able to disturb. I often wondered what made the convicts treat him so leniently; they never ridiculed or abused him, but contented themselves with a few good-humoured jokes and inoffensive witticisms at his expense. They even used to say to each other, when Issaï Fomitch had been more than usually teased, 'Do let our own Issaï Fomitch alone—what would become of us if he were taken?' Whereupon Issaï Fomitch drew himself proudly up and cast a triumphant look around him, pretending not to see that after all he was the laughing-stock of the prison. His arrival there had been as good as a farce—at least I was told so, for he had arrived there some time before me. One fine evening the rumour had suddenly spread that a new-comer, a Jew, was then being shaved in the guard-room, and would in a short time be brought into the cell. As there happened to be no other Jew in the prison at that time, the convicts naturally felt much interested in their new comrade, and crowded round him the moment he crossed the threshold. The sergeant-at-arms took him into a cell, and showed him where he was to sleep. Issaï Fomitch carried in his hand a bag containing his clothing, which had just been delivered to him, and a few of his own things. He put the bag down on the floor, and, scrambling upon his pallet, sat down on it cross-legged, feeling far too frightened to look

around him, while the convicts indulged in a few witty remarks concerning his birth and nationality. Suddenly a young convict pressed through the crowd, carrying in his hand a pair of dirty, old, ragged summer trousers. He sat down by the new-comer, and striking him on the shoulder, said:

'Well, dear friend, so you have come at last! I have been waiting for you to come these six years. How much will you give me for these?' he added, displaying the aforenamed tattered garment.

Poor Issaï Fomitch—who had been in such a state of terror all this time that he had not even dared to steal a glance at the hideous repulsive faces which surrounded him, and still less to utter a word—suddenly revived at the sight of the trousers. He took them, held them up to the light, and examined them minutely, while the crowd was waiting breathless with curiosity to hear what he would say.

'You can't give less than a rouble for them, you know,' continued the young fellow, winking at Issaï Fomitch.

'I can't give you a rouble, but I will let you have seven copecks if you like.'

These were the first words spoken by Issaï Fomitch in the prison, and they were greeted by a shout of laughter.

'Seven! All right, hand them over, 'tis your luck. But mind you take good care of the things, Jew. I shall claim them in good time.'

'Seven, and three per cent., makes ten copecks in all,' continued the Jew, in a trembling voice,

putting his hand in his pocket and glancing furtively at the convicts. He was still terribly afraid of them, though he could not resist the temptation of doing a little business.

'You mean three per cent. for a year?'

'No, no, not for a year, but for a month.'

'Dog of a Jew, what's your name?'

'Issaï Fomitch.'

'Well, Issaï Fomitch, mark my word, you will go far in this world. Good-bye.'

Issaï Fomitch once more carefully examined the trousers, then, folding them up, put them into his bag amidst roars of laughter from the convicts.

He grew to be quite a favourite in the prison, although there was hardly a convict who did not owe him money. Loúka, who had had a good deal to do with Jews in his time, used to plague and tease him sometimes as one would tease a dog or a parrot, that is for fun. Issaï Fomitch was well aware of that, and seemed rather to enjoy being teased than otherwise, and was never afraid of answering back.

'Look out, Jew; I am going to give you as sound a drubbing as you ever had, one of these days.'

'If you hit me once I shall hit you back ten times,' answers Issaï Fomitch with great composure.

'Confounded heap of rags!'

'I don't care if I am a heap of rags.'

'Wretched tatterdemalion of a Jew!'

'Tis all the same to me, provided I have my pockets full of money.'

'You have sold Christ!'

'Not that I know of.'

'Hurrah for Issaï Fomitch! Leave him alone, what should we do if he were taken from us?' shouted the convicts.

'If you don't beware, Jew, you'll be flogged, and sent to Siberia.'

'I thought I was there now.'

'They'll send you further on, to the very end of it.'

'Will God be there?'

'I suppose so.'

'Then I don't care. If God is there, and I have plenty of money in my pocket, I shall be all right, I dare say!'

'Hurrah for Issaï Fomitch!' roar the others, and the Jew looks round triumphantly. He likes being praised, and shows his gratification by beginning to sing in a high squeaking voice a tune, or rather a song, if the constant repetition of the monosyllable 'la' may be termed a song, which, by-the-bye, was the only song he ever gave us during the whole time he spent in the prison. The tune was also a very peculiar one, or rather was no tune at all; but when we became better acquainted, he assured me upon his oath that this was the identical tune which the 600,000 Israelites had sung when they crossed the Red Sea, and that every Jew was bound by their law to sing it when he had gained a victory over his enemies.

Every Friday night our cell used to be crowded with convicts who came to see Issaï Fomitch say his prayers—to his great gratification, as he was a very vain man. He used to begin his devotions by putting a white cloth on a very small table in the

after which ceremony he produced a book, which he opened and laid on the table, lighted two candles, and finally put on his 'robes' (as he called them), muttering certain mysterious words all the time. His 'robes' consisted of a cloak made of some coarse, striped woollen material, which he always kept carefully locked away in his box. He then proceeded to tie a kind of bracelet round his wrists, and contrived to fasten to his forehead a curious wooden implement, not unlike a box, which made him look rather like a unicorn. Having at last completed all these preliminaries, he began to say his prayers, or rather to chant them, at the top of his voice, spitting and writhing himself into queer contortions, and making all sorts of ludicrous and uncouth gestures. We all knew that this was the prescribed form of prayer, and nobody would ever have laughed at it if only Issaï Fomitch had not exaggerated it so as to make it ridiculous. At a certain moment he covered his face with his hands and began to sob violently; the sobbing gradually became a howl; he seemed almost unable to stand with grief and exhaustion, and, bowing low, laid his head with its wooden ornament on the book. Suddenly, in the very midst of his grief, he burst out laughing, and went on chanting his prayers in a voice trembling with joy. 'What is the matter with him now?' one of the convicts would ask in a loud whisper. I once asked him what this sudden change from the deepest grief to the most exuberant joy meant. Issaï Fomitch was delighted to have me ask him questions about his religion. He at once proceeded to explain to me

that sobbing and weeping had been prescribed by their law to express the grief of the Jews at the fall of Jerusalem and their banishment from their native land, and that they were commanded to sob as loud as possible and even beat their breast at such times. But in the midst of his deepest grief he must suddenly, and, as it were, accidentally remember—this was also prescribed by the law—that there existed a prophecy concerning the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, and all at once manifest his joy by laughing, singing, clapping his hands, repeating his prayers in a joyful voice, while at the same time his face must assume a solemn and noble expression. Issaï Fomitch was delighted with this sudden change from grief to joy, and especially with its being prescribed by the law, and assured me that it was a most difficult thing to do well. Once when he was in the midst of his devotions the Major came into the cell, accompanied by the officers on duty and the warders. The convicts all rose respectfully from their pallets, but Issaï Fomitch screamed louder and wriggled about even more frantically than before. He knew that no objections could be raised against his saying his prayers, and at the same time dared not interrupt them, as all interruptions were strictly prohibited by the law. The Major, on hearing those dismal shrieks, came up to see what was the matter, and stopped in front of him. Issaï Fomitch turned his back on the table and went on chanting his prophecy, accompanying his recitative with wild gesticulations. As this happened to be the particular moment when his countenance was to express happiness

and nobility, he grinned, winked with both eyes at the Major, and nodded his head violently. The latter stared at him for some moments, then burst out laughing, called him a fool, and left the room, while Issaï Fomitch screamed louder than he had ever done before. As he was eating his supper an hour later, I asked him what he would have done if the Major had taken the whole thing ill.

'Whom do you mean?' asked he.

'Why, our Major! Did you not see him?'

'No, I did not.'

'Why he stopped right in front of you.'

But Issaï Fomitch assured me gravely that he had not seen the Major, because he always fell into a trance when he was saying his prayers, and consequently neither saw nor heard what was going on about him. I seem to see Issaï Fomitch now, wandering about the prison on Saturdays, and seeking to carry out the prescriptions of the law to their full extent by doing nothing at all. He would come home from the synagogue brimful of all kinds of improbable news and rumours from St. Petersburg, which he would repeat to me, together with queer anecdotes, assuring me solemnly that he had heard them from his friends, who in their turn had been told by some one who knew all about it.

But I fear I have allowed myself to be led away from my subject, and said too much about Issaï Fomitch.

There were only two public baths in the town. One was kept by a Jew, and had separate rooms, which cost fifty copecks each, and was frequented by

the higher classes. The other bath was patronised by the poor people. It was very small, could only hold a few bathers at a time, and was remarkable for its dirt. We were taken there as a matter of course. It was a bright, sunny day, and the convicts were as happy as children at the idea of walking through the town, and laughed and joked all the way. A whole battalion of soldiers with loaded guns accompanied us, much to the admiration of the lookers-on. When we got to the bath we were divided into two parties, as the room was too small to hold us all. One party went in first, while the rest waited in a small ante-room which opened into the bath-room and was very cold. Petróff came up to me, and volunteered his services in helping me to undress and wash myself. Another convict, Bakloushin, joined us, and asked to be allowed to help Petróff. He was a jolly, good-humoured fellow, and in the Special Department, and went by the name of the Pioneer. I had seen him once or twice before. Petróff even helped me to undress, as I was rather long about it, not being yet accustomed to my chains, and it was very cold in the little ante-room. I gave Petróff a few coins to buy soap and a piece of bast[1] with. We each had had a small piece of soap, not bigger than a very thin slice of cheese, given us before starting. There was a kind of stall in the ante-room, where soap, sbíten,[2] kalatchi, and hot

[1] A tissue made of strips of bast is much used in Russia for scrubbing floors, saucepans, etc., and even human bodies in the bath.

[2] A drink made of hot water and molasses.

water could be purchased. According to an arrangement which had previously been made with the owner of the bath, each man was to have one can of hot water provided for him. Those who wanted more water might buy another canful for a mere trifle, the water being handed into the room through a small window which opened into the ante-room. Having at last succeeded in undressing me, Petróff insisted on my taking his arm, and led me carefully into the bath-room, remarking that I was not quite accustomed to walking in my chains yet. 'You had better pull them over your calves,' said he, holding me by the hand, as if I were a baby and he my nursemaid. 'Take care, don't stumble over the threshold.' I confess that I felt a little annoyed at being taken care of in this way, and I hesitated whether I had not better tell Petróff that I was quite capable of taking care of myself, but he would not have believed me.

When Petróff opened the door of the bath-room at last, my first thought was that I must have got into hell by mistake. Into a room not more than twelve feet long, and as many broad, a crowd of human beings had been crowded. A thick cloud of vapour hung over the bathers, nearly enveloping them, and the floor was so filthy that I did not know where to set my foot, and would have turned back at once if Petróff had not encouraged me to go on, and piloted me to a bench across the heads of the people who were sitting on the floor. This was by no means an easy undertaking, and we had repeatedly to ask them to make a little room for us. When at last we

got to the wall where the bench was, we found that every available place on the forms had already been taken. Petróff explained to me that we must buy a place, and immediately entered into negotiation with a man who was sitting by the window, and who consented to let me have his place for a copeck. Petróff had prudently carried the coin in his fist all the way. He handed it over to the man, who immediately disappeared under the bench, just below my seat, where the mud was about two inches deep and it was quite dark. Even the space under the benches was occupied; the men squatted about on the floor washing themselves, while others who had been less fortunate in obtaining a place stood upright between them, the dirty water trickling down from their bodies on the cropped heads of those who sat below. The shelves were covered with convicts, who tried to screw themselves into the smallest possible space. Few, however, of the convicts really washed themselves, as the common people care but little for soap and hot water, their idea of a bath consisting in getting up to the highest shelf, whipping themselves violently with a bundle of birch twigs, and then pouring cold water down their backs. About fifty birch rods were in constant movement on the shelves, water was being continually thrown at the hot oven to make more steam, till the heat was almost unbearable. And all this mass of human beings was swaying backwards and forwards, shouting and yelling, and clanking their chains on the floor. Some, in trying to cross the floor, were caught in the chains of those who were sitting down, and falling on their

heads, knocked them down, cursing and swearing. The dirt and filth actually flowed in streams everywhere. The men were perfectly wild with excitement, and yelled and shrieked like demons. A dense crowd had collected round the window where the cans of hot water were handed in, and carried by the buyers to their respective places, not, however, without spilling half of it over the heads of the bathers who squatted on the floor. From time to time the moustached face of a soldier would look in at the door or window to see if there were no disorders going on. The closely-cropped pates and red-hot bodies of the convicts appeared to me more hideous than ever. Their backs were covered with scars from the lash or the stick, which stood out more vividly on the red surface, and looked like so many fresh stripes. I could not help shuddering with horror at the sight of them. More water is being thrown over the hot stones, and a thick cloud of vapour rises from them and fills the whole bath-room, which resounds with maddening shrieks and howls. Here and there scarred backs, shaven heads, distorted hands and feet loom though the cloud, and over all this Bedlam soars the voice of Issaï Fomitch, who has climbed on to the highest shelf. He is nearly beside himself with the heat and whipping, but it seems as if no earthly heat could ever satisfy him. He hires a man for a copeck to whip him, but the latter soon finds the heat too much for him, throws down the rod, and runs away to refresh himself with a cold shower-bath. Issaï Fomitch, nothing loth, hires another, then a third—he can be generous at times, and has as many as five

men to whip him to-day. 'Hurrah for Issaï Fomitch!' shout the convicts from below. Issaï Fomitch feels that at this moment he is high above everybody else, and can look down upon us, and triumphantly shrieks out his pæan 'la, la, la' in a sharp, shrill voice like a madman's. It struck me that hell must be not at all unlike our bath-room, and I communicated my thought to Petróff, who merely looked around in silence.

I had intended to buy him a place next to me, but he sat down at my feet, assuring me that he was quite comfortable there. Bakloushin kept us provided with hot water, which he bought and brought us whenever we required it. Petróff informed me that he was going to wash me himself, so that I might be 'quite clean,' and tried to persuade me to let myself be whipped, which I refused to do. After scrubbing me all over with soap and water he remarked, 'And now I am going to wash your little feet.' I felt very much inclined to tell him that there was no earthly reason why I should not perform this operation myself, but did not choose to contradict him, and gave myself bodily up to him. There was nothing servile in the term 'little feet.' I suppose Petróff only said so to distinguish them from those of other people who had large feet. After I had been well washed he conducted me back into the ante-room with as many precautions as if I had been a china doll, and having helped me to dress, he rushed back into the bath-room, and forthwith proceeded to whip himself. When we got home I offered Petróff a cup of tea, which he gratefully accepted. The tea was fol-

lowed by a dram, which he swallowed with evident satisfaction, coughed, and, after remarking that I had completely revived him, hurried away into the kitchen. Another guest succeeded him—Bakloushin, whom I had previously asked to come to tea.

I have never known a better-tempered, more amusing fellow than Bakloushin. It is true that he was sometimes rather hard on others, and quarrelled frequently with his fellow-prisoners, especially if they wanted to meddle with his private affairs; yet, as his anger never lasted long, he was a universal favourite, and his entrance was always hailed with great delight. He may have been about thirty years old, was tall and lithe, with a good-natured, handsome face which was disfigured by a wart. He was a first-rate mimic, and would sometimes keep the whole cell in a roar for hours together by mimicking people whom he had met or seen; and he was brimful of life and activity, always ready for a bit of fun. We became acquainted very soon after my arrival. He at once took care to inform me that he had been educated in a Government school for the sons of soldiers; then served in the army as pioneer, and by his good behaviour attracted the notice of his superiors, and became quite a favourite with them. He was also of a literary turn, and very fond of books, and had hardly seen me once or twice before he began to question me about St. Petersburg.

While he was drinking his tea he first made the whole company laugh by relating how Lieutenant Sh—— had snubbed our Major that very morning; then, drawing nearer to me, informed me with an air

of great satisfaction that he hoped we would have private theatricals at Christmas. It appeared from what he said that it had for many years past been the custom in the prison to get up something of that kind during the Christmas holidays. Some of the convicts volunteered their services as actors, while others prepared the decorations. Some charitable persons in the town had promised to lend the necessary costumes, and they even hoped to get an officer's uniform with epaulets from an officer's servant. He only feared that the Major might take it into his head to forbid the theatricals as he had done last year. But then he had been in a bad humour, having lost a good deal of money at cards, and something had gone wrong in the prison, and there was no reason why he should interfere this time. In a word, Bakloushin was very much excited about the private theatricals, and no wonder, seeing that he had exerted himself greatly about getting them up. I felt quite touched by his childlike joy, and promised myself that I would assist at the first representation. As we got more intimate, he told me in the course of our conversation that he had not served all the time in St. Petersburg, but had been sent to the garrison at R—— for some breach of discipline. 'And then I came here,' he remarked quietly.

'What for?' asked I.

'Would you like to guess, Alexander Petróvitch? Because I was in love.'

'Well, that is the first time that I have heard of people being sent here for being in love,' retorted I, laughing.

'Why, you see, Alexander Petróvitch,' continued he, 'the truth of the matter is that I shot a German dead at the same time. Though it does seem hard to send a fellow here for such a trifle.'

'I should like to hear all about it,' said I.

'It is a very funny story.'

'I shall like it the better for being amusing.'

'Would you really? Very well, then, I will tell you.'

And he told me a strange, but by no means 'funny' tale.

'You see,' began Bakloushin, 'when I got to R—— I rather liked the town, for it is large and well-built, only there are a great many Germans settled there. I was a young fellow then, and quite a favourite with my superiors, and I thought I would have a good time in R——. So I walked about with my cap on one side, winking at the German girls, and, would you believe it, one of them quite took my fancy! She was living with an old aunt, a perfect dragon of a woman; they were both clear-starchers by trade and made a deal of money. I began by parading up and down under her window, and at last we became very good friends. Louisa spoke Russian very nicely indeed, with just the least lisp—and was the prettiest creature you ever saw. Well, at first I thought I might take a few liberties, you know, but she never would let me touch her, saying, "No, Sásha,[1] I want to remain innocent and pure, and make you a good little wife;" and then she would pet me and tease me, and laugh so merrily. . . . Yes, she was a good

[1] Abbreviation of Alexander.

wench, and so clean! She actually put it into my head to marry her; and I had quite made up my mind to go to the colonel and ask his leave to marry, when that very same day she did not come out to meet me as she had been wont to do. Two days passed without my seeing her, and on the third day I wrote to her a letter. No answer came. I wondered what could have happened. For, you see, if she had been playing false all the time, she would have come out to meet me, or answered my letter. I said to myself, "That girl cannot lie; it is all the old aunt's doing." You see, I was afraid of the old lady, and had never been to her house yet; and we made believe that she knew nothing about our love, though she did know all about it. I was quite wild with grief and anxiety, and at last wrote her another letter to say that if she did not come out to meet me at once I should go to her aunt's. She came, crying bitterly, and told me that a rich old German watchmaker, a distant relative of theirs, wanted her to marry him that he might have a wife to take care of him in his old age. He was going to make her very happy, and had intended to propose to her long ago, but had always kept putting it off for some reason or other. "Sásha," said she, "he is rich, and I should be happy; and I know you would not like to spoil my prospects in life?" And she cried again, and put her arms round my neck quite lovingly. Well, I could not help thinking that after all she was perhaps right, as I was nothing but a subaltern officer at the time. So I said to her, "Farewell, Louisa; God bless you! I will not interfere with

your happiness. But tell me one thing—is he handsome?" "No," said she, "he is old, and has such a long nose;" and then she burst out laughing. I left her, and went my way, thinking, well, I suppose it is all for the best. The next morning I thought I would go and take a look at her German, and accordingly walked past his shop—she had told me the name of the street. I looked in at the window as he sat at his work-table making watches. He may have been forty-five years old or so, and had a hooked nose and big staring eyes, and wore a coat with swallow-tails and a stiff white collar, looking altogether very grand. I was just going to smash his window, but said to myself, "Let well alone. It is all over with me!" It was night when I got back to the barracks. I threw myself on my bed, and, would you believe it, I cried bitterly. Several days passed, during which I saw nothing of Louisa. At last an old washerwoman, who knew the girl, told me that the German knew all about our love, and that that was the reason why he had proposed so soon, else he would have waited two years longer. She added that he had made Louisa promise that she would never see me again, and that he kept both her and her aunt pretty strict, and they were afraid that he might change his mind, as nothing had been arranged definitively yet. She also told me that he had asked them both to breakfast on the day after to-morrow, which happened to be a Sunday, and that he had also invited another relation, an old man who had formerly been a merchant, but had lost all his money and had got a situation somewhere as overseer. When I

heard that perhaps everything was to be decided on Sunday, I felt so angry that I hardly knew what to do with myself, and could think of nothing else for the next two days. I could have eaten that German up alive, I hated him so.

'Early on Sunday morning I had not yet made up my mind what I was going to do; but after church I jumped up, put on my overcoat, and went straight to the German's house. I really cannot tell you why I went to him, or what I wanted to say to him, for I did not know myself. Anyhow, I just popped a pistol into my pocket. It was an old-fashioned weapon—I had practised shooting with it when I was a boy—and so old that I did not believe that it would ever go off. However, I loaded it with a ball, thinking that if the worst came to the worst, and they were rude to me or wanted to turn me out of doors, I would just take it out and frighten them. When I got there I found the shop empty and the whole party sitting in the back parlour. There was nobody else in the house; a German woman, who did the housework and cooked for him, was out, I believe. I walked into the shop, and then straight to the back parlour—the door was fast. It was an old door, and fastened on the inside with a hook. My heart beat faster as I stopped to listen to what they were saying; but I could not understand one blessed word, as they were talking German. I just gave one hearty kick, and the door flew open. The table was set for breakfast; a big coffee-pot was boiling over a spirit lamp, and there was a plate of rusks and a tray with a decanter of brandy, a herring and sausages,

and a bottle of wine all ready on the table. Louisa and her aunt were sitting on the sofa dressed in their best clothes. The lover was sitting on a chair opposite, in his dress-coat and high collar, with another German sitting beside him—a fat, grey-haired old fellow, who never said a word. Louisa turned pale when I burst into the room; her aunt started up, and sat down again; and the German looked deuced cross. He rose and said angrily to me:

'"What do you want here?"

'I felt a little ashamed of myself at first, but my anger got the better of me, and I said: "I have come to pay you a visit. Where are your manners? Why don't you ask me what I will take?"

'The German thought a while, and then said, "Sit down."

'I sat down. "Where is the liquor?" says I.

'"Here is some brandy," says he. "You may drink it if you like."

'"Why don't you give me better stuff than that?" said I.—You see I was getting very angry.

'"The liquor is very good," says he.

'I felt annoyed that he should treat me as if I were beneath him, especially as Louisa was looking on. So I swallowed my glass of spirits, and said, "Why are you so rude to me, you d——d German? You had better make friends with me. I have come for that purpose. I want to be your friend."

'"I cannot be your friend," says he, "for you are only a common soldier."

'Then I could stand it no longer, and burst out,

"You scarecrow, you sausage-maker![1] Don't you know I have you in my power? I can shoot you dead this very moment." And with this I whipped out my pistol, walked up to him, and held it close to his head. They all seemed half-dead with fear, and nobody said a word. The old gentleman had turned quite pale, and sat there trembling like a leaf.

'My German looked astonished at first, but soon regained his self-possession, and said, "I am not afraid of you. And I beg you to stop this joking if you are an honest man. I am not afraid of you!"

'"That's a lie," says I. And sure enough he was perfectly white with fear, and never dared to move even his head away, but sat quite still.

'"No," says he, "for you dare not kill me."

'"Why not, pray?"

'"Because it is against the laws, and you will be severely punished if you do," says he.

'Now if that fool of a German had only held his tongue he might be alive yet, but as it was he only made me more angry.

'"Did you say," asked I, "that I dare not shoot you dead?"

'"No—o—o!" says he.

'"Quite sure?"

'"Yes."

'"Take that, then, you sausage!" And down he tumbled, and the women shrieked.

'I put the pistol back into my pocket and left the

[1] 'Sausage-maker' is a nickname given by the Russians to the Germans, probably because of their great partiality for this article of food.

house. When I got near our barracks, I threw it into the nettles by the gate, and then went in and lay down on my bed, expecting every moment to see them come in and take me. But the day passed away, and no one came. Towards nightfall I felt as if I must see Louisa again. On my way to her house I passed the watchmaker's shop—there was a large crowd before the house, and a lot of policemen. I went straight to the old washerwoman and told her to call Louisa. She came running at once, put her arms round my neck, and began to cry, saying that it was all her doing, and that she ought not to have listened to her aunt. She then told me that the old lady had been taken ill with the fright and excitement, and never once mentioned what had happened, and had forbidden the girl to speak of it also. She was terribly afraid of getting mixed up in the affair, and told Louisa they had better try and keep clear of it. Nobody knew that they had been there, as the workmen were out, and he had even sent his servant away for fear that she might find out that he wanted to marry Louisa. He had made the coffee himself, and got all the things ready. The old merchant had never been known to say a word in his life, if he could help it, and after the murder he took his hat and went away. He was sure not to speak of it either, said Louisa. And so it happened. For a whole fortnight nobody suspected me, and, would you believe it, Alexander Petróvitch, this was the happiest time of my life. Louisa and I met every day, and she had grown so fond of me, poor thing, and would say to me, crying bitterly,

"I will follow you wherever they send you; I will leave all and go with you!" I did feel so sorry for her. But the aunt and the old gentleman did denounce me after all, and I was arrested a fortnight after——'

'But stop a moment,' said I, interrupting Bakloushin. 'Surely for your crime you could only have been sentenced to ten or twelve years' penal servitude in the Civil Department. And yet you are in the Special Department. How is this possible?'

'Ah, that's for something else,' said Bakloushin. 'When I was called up before the court-martial my captain began to call me names. I could not stand that, and said to him, "How dare you call me names? Have you forgotten that you are standing before the mirror,[1] you blackguard?" Then they had to begin it all over again, and I was sentenced to four thousand strokes, and to be sent to the Special Department. But I had the satisfaction to know that my captain and myself left the prison at the same time—I to walk down the green street,[2] and he to be degraded to a common soldier, and sent to the Caucasus. Good-bye, Alexander Petróvitch. Don't forget to come and see our play.'

[1] The mirror (serzálo) is an emblem of the Imperial presence in every law-court. It is in shape like a prism, hollow in the middle, and surmounted by the imperial eagle.

[2] Run the gauntlet.

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

The long-expected and long-looked-forward-to day broke at last. Very little work had been done on Christmas Eve, and such of the convicts as had been sent out to work soon came back again, either alone or in groups, nor did any one leave the prison after dinner. In the morning several expeditions had been made to the town to make some necessary purchases for the feast, or to call on some old friends who might perhaps be induced to contribute a trifle towards the expenses, or to get a few old bills cashed that had been standing out for some time. Bakloushin and a few other amateur actors went to call on some officers' servants to try and borrow a few additions towards the theatrical wardrobe. Some bustled about the prison or looked grave and pre-occupied only because others, who were really busy, looked so. Some who knew that they could not possibly expect any money tried to assume a certain lofty and self-satisfied air, as if they were expecting every moment to receive large sums. In short, everybody looked as if something unusual were going to happen the next day. Towards night the invalided soldiers who

had been commissioned by the convicts to make certain purchases in the town came back laden with eatables—beef, sucking-pigs, and even geese. Many of the convicts, even such as were of a saving disposition, and never spent a copeck if they could help it, would have thought it very wrong indeed not to eat an extra good meal on Christmas Day, which was the convicts' holiday, as there were only three such days in the whole year.

Who knows what memories may have been awakened in the hearts of the poor outcasts on such a day? A solemn stillness pervaded the prison, and if any one happened to disturb it even by chance he was immediately put down and scolded as if he had been guilty of some downright bad deed. There is to me something touching in this peculiar attitude of the convicts towards a holiday. They had been taught from their childhood to respect it as a great and holy day, and they seemed instinctively to feel that by keeping up their veneration for it they still kept up a sort of connection with the world at large.

Akím Akímytch had made great preparations for Christmas Day. There could hardly be any sweet memories connected with it in his soul, poor fellow, as he had lost his parents very early in life and had been left to the care of strangers till he was fifteen, when he entered the army. Neither was he of a particularly religious disposition; there seemed to be no room left for religious feelings in his soul, for all his wishes, passions, and aspirations, if he ever had had any, had been swallowed up by his desire to be a thoroughly moral and well-behaved man. He had

made all his preparations to spend the great day quietly and peacefully, without any bustle or excitement; and he was not a great thinker, never troubling himself about the meaning of a thing, but careful to obey his superiors. If he had been told to do one thing one day, and the next day the contrary thing, he would have done so without demurring, and to all probability without even wondering why he should have been told to do two things which were diametrically opposed to each other. Once in his life he had acted according to his own judgment, and had never forgotten the result of his action. He had not enough common sense to see wherein he had been guilty, but he arrived at the conclusion that he never under any circumstances ought to judge for himself. The convicts used to say that his brain was not made for thinking. He had bought a sucking-pig, stuffed and roasted it with his own hands, because it was the custom to eat sucking-pig on Christmas Day; he even had a sort of respectful feeling for the animal, as if it belonged to a peculiar species which could only be eaten on holidays, and not a common pig which might be bought and roasted any day. Perhaps sucking-pig on Christmas Days was one of the early associations of his boyhood, and he had concluded from that that it must form one of the necessary belongings of that day, and I am sure that if he had once omitted to buy a pig on that occasion, his conscience would have troubled him all the rest of his life. He had been wearing all the time his old suit of clothes, which had begun to look woefully shabby notwithstanding the numerous darns and patches. We now found

out to our surprise that he had had a new suit given him four months ago, but that he had carefully stowed it away in his box with the intention of wearing it for the first time on Christmas Day. On the preceding night he produced it from his box, spread it out on his pallet, examined it carefully, brushed it, and, having at last completed these preliminary ceremonies, finally tried it on. It fitted him to a nicety, and Akím Akímytch grinned with delight as he tried to catch a glimpse of himself in a very small bit of looking-glass which he had with his own hands framed and adorned with a gilt paper border. On more minute inspection it struck him, however, that one hook on the collar of his jacket was not in its right place, and no sooner had he discovered this important fact than Akím Akímytch resolved to alter it. This done, he tried the jacket on once more, and had the satisfaction of finding that it now fitted admirably well. He then divested himself of his new clothes, and put them back into the box all ready for next day. His head was sufficiently shaved, but a look in the glass convinced him that it was not smooth enough, as the hair was beginning to grow just a very little here and there, and he immediately betook himself to the 'Major' to have it cropped according to rules. Although he knew that nobody would examine him the next day to see if he were shaved and dressed, he strictly fulfilled all those small duties for the sake of his own conscience. Having done with himself, he, being the senior of the room, ordered a convict to bring in some hay, and directed him how to strew it all over the

floor. It was the custom in the convict prison to put hay on the floor on Christmas Eve. His day's work being thus happily at an end. Akím Akímytch said his prayers and lay down on his pallet, where he soon fell asleep. The others soon followed his example. There was no more work done that night, neither were there any card parties. The morning dawned at last. Long before the first streak of light appeared in the East, the *réveille* was sounded, the doors were unlocked, and the sergeant-at-arms came in to count the convicts. He wished us a merry Christmas, and all the men answered him civilly and even cordially. Akím Akímytch did not spend much time over his prayers that morning, but hurried off to the kitchen, together with several others, to see how their geese and pigs were getting on, and to superintend the important operation of roasting them. We could see from our snow- and ice-covered windows the blaze of the kitchen fire as it shone out against the dark winter morning. The convicts were running about the yard and rushing in and out of the kitchens. A very few had already paid the tapster a visit, but these were the most impatient ones. On the whole, they all conducted themselves with great propriety, and neither quarrelled nor swore.

I went out into the courtyard. The day was dawning in the sky, the stars were growing paler in the morning light, and a transparent cold mist rose from the earth. Clouds of smoke issued from the kitchen chimneys. A few convicts whom I happened to meet wished me cordially a merry Christmas. I thanked them and reciprocated the wish. One or two of them

had never exchanged a word with me before in the course of the whole month. I had just got to the kitchen door when a convict, with his fur coat thrown loosely over his shoulders, came running after me. He had caught sight of me suddenly, and called out, 'Alexander Petróvitch! Alexander Petróvitch!' I stopped to wait for him. He was a young man, with a round face and very kind soft eyes, and of a very silent and retiring disposition. He had never paid the least attention to me yet, and I did not even know his name. He rushed up to me, panting for breath, and stopped suddenly, staring at me with a broad grin on his face.

'What is it?' asked I, rather amazed at his proceedings, and seeing that he was not going to speak after all.

'Why, I thought, it is a holiday——' murmured he; and suddenly discovering that he had nothing more to say, he left me abruptly and rushed into the kitchen. Let me add here that we never spoke to each other again till I left the prison.

A great crowd had collected round the kitchen fires. Nobody had eaten anything, as the Christmas fast could not properly be said to be over till the priest had said mass, when we might consider ourselves authorised to eat meat once more; and everybody was keeping his appetite for this solemn occasion. It was hardly daylight when a peremptory call for the cooks resounded from the corporals, who were outside the prison gates. These calls were repeated almost every moment in the course of the next two hours, and their object was to summon the cooks from the

kitchen to receive the contributions and presents which were sent to the prison from every corner of the town. They consisted chiefly of bread, rolls, cheesecakes, creamcakes, pancakes, shortbread, etc.; and I believe that there was not a housewife in the town who had not sent a contribution to the prisoners in the convict prison. Every trifle, even the smallest roll, was gratefully accepted. The cooks took off their caps, and, bowing to the ground, wished the kind givers a merry Christmas, and carried the bread into the kitchen. When a sufficiently large heap had accumulated, the seniors of each cell were called to divide the bread among the convicts. This was done with the greatest possible equality and justice. The seniors carried the portion allotted for each room into their respective cells, and divided it among the men. Nobody grumbled at the portion he received, or even so much as suspected the seniors of partiality.

Having finished his work in the kitchen, Akím Akímytch bethought himself that it might be time to dress for mass. He went through this ceremony with great solemnity and decency, taking care not to leave a hook or a button unfastened, and then knelt down to say his prayers properly. Several of the other convicts were already on their knees saying theirs; they were mostly old men, as the young fellows cared little for prayer, and only crossed themselves in the morning when they got up. After he had finished his devotions, Akím Akímytch approached me, with a very dignified mien, to wish me a merry Christmas. I at once invited him to tea, and he asked me to share his pig. Then Petróff came in to

wish me joy; he had evidently been paying sundry visits to the tapster this morning, for he ran up to me quite out of breath, and after staring at me for some time, with an expectant wistful look on his face, murmured something, and betook himself to the kitchen.

Meanwhile, great preparations had been made for the reception of the Pope in the cell where the military prisoners lived. It was furnished differently from ours, the pallets being placed along the walls so as to form a kind of settee, instead of occupying the centre of the room, as was the case in our cell. I suppose it had been arranged thus with a view to assemble the convicts occasionally in it. A table, covered with a white towel, was placed in the middle of the room, and on it a burning lamp and the image of a saint. The Pope came at last, carrying the Cross and the holy water. He said mass before the little table, then, turning towards the convicts, held out the Cross to be kissed; this they all did with great respect. He then went through our cells, and sprinkled them with holy water. He also honoured the kitchen with a visit, and praised our bread—which was famous in the town for its sweet taste—upon which the convicts, to express their gratitude, begged leave to present him with two new loaves which had just come out of the oven, and immediately despatched an invalided soldier to his house with the loaves. The convicts followed the Cross, and accompanied it to the gates with great respect. Our next visitors were our Major and the Commandant. The latter was very much loved and respected by the con-

victs. Both went over the whole prison, wished us a merry Christmas, and the Commandant even tasted our shtshi in the kitchen. It happened to be very good that day, as there was a great deal of meat in it, perhaps as much as a pound a head. We also had millet-kasha,[1] with plenty of butter. The Major showed the Commandant out, and then returned to bid us to sit down to our dinner. He happened to look particularly wicked that day, and the convicts tried to get out of his way for fear that he might suddenly pounce upon them and spoil their holiday.

We sat down to dinner. Akím Akímytch's sucking-pig was excellent. And now a strange thing happened—so long as the Major was in the prison everybody was as sober as sober could be, but hardly had the gates shut upon him when one half of the convicts appeared to be more or less drunk. There were many joyous rubicund faces among the crowd; and the sound of the balalaïkas[2] was heard at intervals. The Pole with his fiddle had already been hired by some reveller for the whole day, and was following his patron fiddling merry dances. The conversation became more loud and animated as the dinner drew towards its end, but no serious disturbances occurred. As soon as the meal was over, the elder and more sensible of the lot repaired to their pallets to take a nap. Their good example was followed by Akím

[1] Kasha, a kind of thick porridge, which can be prepared of different grains. It is eaten with butter or milk, or cream and sugar.

[2] A sort of guitar with three strings.

Akímytch, who probably thought it his duty to take an afternoon nap on a great holiday. The old Raskólnik also lay down for a little while, but soon rose and climbed upon the stove with his book, and read and prayed there till the small hours of the night. He said that it pained him to see the 'shameful rioting,' as he termed it. The Tcherkesses had sat down in a heap on the steps, and watched the drunken men with curiosity, and perhaps not without a slight feeling of disgust. I met Nourra, who shook his head with an expression of pious horror, saying, 'Won't Allah be angry at this!' Issaï Fomitch lighted a candle in his corner with great self-complacency and began to work, to show how little he cared for our holiday. A few maïdáns were going on in the corners, as nobody feared the invalided soldiers who lived in our cells; and if the sergeant-at-arms should come in unexpectedly he was sure to pretend not to see what was going on; besides, spies had been placed at the door to give the alarm in case he should come. He did look in two or three times in the course of the day, but as the alarm had been given in time the drunken men hid themselves, the cards vanished, and he pretended not to see the smaller disturbances—as, for instance, a tipsy man reeling about the room. Gradually the men began to get more drunk and quarrelsome; and those that were still sober found it hard work to watch over them and keep them comparatively quiet. This was a great day for Gásin, who walked triumphantly up and down before his place on the pallets, under which he kept a plentiful supply of spirit bottles, which he had managed to

hide in the snow behind the prison till it was time to bring them in. He seemed very much pleased, and chuckled quietly as the crowd of purchasers increased round his pallet. He was perfectly sober himself, not having touched a drop of liquor that day, as it was his intention to carouse when the holidays were over, after having previously plundered the convicts. Here and there in the rooms singing and music were heard; but the singers had been drinking too much, and their songs sounded like wails. Some strutted about with their own balalaïkas, and their fur coats thrown over their shoulders, running their fingers along the strings. Eight members of the Special Department had formed themselves into a choir, and sang beautifully to the accompaniment of guitars and balalaïkas. A few national airs were sung, but the majority preferred singing so-called 'convict songs,' some of which were exceedingly sad, while others were evidently meant for comic songs. I remember one of the former kind; it was sung to a beautiful tune, and had probably been composed by some poor exile. I can only call to memory the first two couplets. It began thus:—

When will my eye behold the land
Where I was born?
To suffer daily without guilt
Is now my fate.

This song was a favourite with the men, and I have often heard it since. Sometimes, in the quiet evening time, a poor fellow would steal out of the cell and go and sit down on the steps outside, lean his head on his hand pensively, and strike up the tune in a

high falsetto voice. It seemed as if one's heart would break to hear him sing it. There were some fine voices amongst the men. Meanwhile it had been growing dark. There was an under-current of sadness and despair in all the mirth and drunken revelry. All had looked forward to spending that long-expected day merrily and happily, and what a terribly sad and dreary day it had turned out after all! It seemed as if they all had been bitterly disappointed in some cherished hope, they looked so sad and wretched. Petróff ran in to see me twice in the course of the day; he, too, seemed to have been expecting that something would happen at last—I do not think he himself knew what it was to be. But there was in his eyes a wistful look which spoke too plainly of his innermost feelings. He was nearly sober, having drunk very little that day, and kept rushing in and out of the barracks as if in search of something. But he found only drunken men swaggering about, hiccoughing and swearing. Sirótkin also wandered restlessly about in a new red shirt, looking as handsome as ever, but with the same expectant look on his face. Towards nightfall the prison became a perfect Pandemonium. True, there was no lack of ludicrous incidents, but even these failed to amuse me. In one corner two convicts were having a serious discussion as to which of them was to stand treat. It had been going on for some time, and threatened to develop into a fight. One of them seemed to owe the other a special grudge, as was evident from his trying to prove, in a very shaky voice, that he had been shamefully treated by his

friend last year, about Easter-time, when he sold a fur coat and kept part of the money back. Something else had also happened about that time, but he was not quite sure what it had been. The accuser was a tall, strong fellow, by no means stupid, with a marked tendency to forming sudden friendships and pouring out his grief when drunk. He had evidently begun the quarrel with the intention of making friends with his adversary as soon as it was over. The latter was short and stout, with a round face, very shrewd and clever. He had probably been imbibing more than his comrade, though the effects of the liquor hardly showed themselves yet. He had the reputation of being very rich, and of having a strong will of his own. He led his friend towards the tapster, while the other kept repeating, in a loud voice, that he must treat him to a glass of liquor, 'if you are an honest man.'

The tapster pours out a glass of liquor and hands it to him. There is the slightest shade of scorn in his behaviour towards the demonstrative friend who does not pay for his liquor, and a great deal of respect towards the other one who pays.

'Indeed, Stépka, it is your duty,' says the expansive friend, seeing that the victory is on his side; 'you owe me that.'

'Oh, I'm not going to waste my breath arguing with you,' says Stépka.

'No, Stépka, that's a lie now,' repeats the first, taking the cup from the tapster; 'you owe me money, you know that, don't you now? But you have no conscience, and your eyes are not your own, you

have borrowed them somewhere. You are a scoundrel, Stépka, mark my words.'

'Look out, you are spilling all the liquor! If people are good enough to treat you, you had better drink quickly. I can't stand waiting here till to-morrow morning,' shouts the tapster.

'I'm drinking as fast as I can—you needn't yell at me like that. I wish you a merry Christmas, Stepan Doroféitch,' added he politely, turning with a slight bow to Stépka, whom he had called a scoundrel only a few minutes ago. 'May you live a hundred years, without counting those you have lived already.' He tossed off the liquor, coughed, cleared his throat, and wiped his mouth. 'There was a time, my brothers, when I could drink a good deal more than I can now,' added he gravely, addressing the bystanders in general and nobody in particular, 'but I fear I am getting old now. Thank you, Stepán Doroféitch.'

'Don't mention it, pray.'

'Well, Stépka, I will thank you for it all the same. But let me tell you also that you are a great rascal, you——'

'Let me tell you something, you drunken ass,' interrupts Stépka, who has lost all patience. 'Listen, and mind every word I say to you. The world is large enough for us both—you take one half and I will take the other, and never let me see your face again. I am tired of seeing you.'

'I want my money.'

'What money do you want, you drunken idiot?'

'All right. In the next world you will come and

ask me to take it back, and I won't take it then. We have to work hard enough to earn it—there is sweat on that money which you keep from me. But, I tell you, my pjatak[1] will bring trouble on your head in the next world.'

'Go to the devil!'

'You need not hurry me, I am going fast enough!'

'Get along with you.'

And they quarrel again more violently than ever.

Two friends are sitting side by side on a pallet. One of them is a tall, strong-built man, with a red face, not unlike a butcher in appearance. He is nearly crying, something must have affected him very much. His friend is a thin, miserable-looking individual, with a long nose and small eyes, like a pig's, which he keeps permanently fixed on the ground. He is an educated man, has been a clerk formerly, and patronises his friend, to the latter's secret annoyance.

'He has dared to do it,' shouts the stout friend. He has put his left hand on the clerk's head, and keeps shaking it with all his might. 'Dared to do it' means that he has been struck. The butcher-like looking friend, who has formerly served in the army, is secretly jealous of the superior education which his pale, haggard friend has received, and they vie with each other in elegant and refined expressions.

'I tell you, you are wrong,' gravely begins the clerk, still keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

'He has dared to do it—don't you hear?' inter-

[1] Five copecks.

rupts the other, shaking his beloved friend's head with greater energy than before. 'I have nobody left in the world except you—don't you hear? And I tell you, and you alone, that he has dared to——'

'Let me tell you, my dear friend, that your stupid justification only brings shame on your head,' politely replies the clerk in a low voice. 'You must confess, my dear friend, that all this drunkenness is caused by your own inconsistency.'

The stout friend falls back a little, stares at the little clerk, who is delighted with his eloquence, and suddenly hits him a blow in the face with his huge fist. This puts an end to their friendship for the rest of the day, as the dear friend tumbles down under the pallet.

A friend of mine who is in the Special Department comes in. He is very plain-looking, but a good-humoured jolly fellow who likes a bit of fun. It is the same convict who, on my first day in prison, inquired in the kitchen where the rich man lived, told us that he was proud, and drank tea with me.

He was about forty years old, and had a very thick under-lip and a big nose covered with warts. In his hands he held a balalaïka, and from time to time passed his fingers along the cords. At his heels followed a very short convict with a remarkably large head, whom I hardly knew at all, and to whom nobody ever paid the slightest attention. He was working in the tailoring department. To-day, being drunk, he had taken a violent fancy to Varlámoff, and followed him like his shadow in a state of terrible excitement, gesticulating like a maniac, hitting

out right and left and striking the walls and benches with his fists, and very nearly crying. Varlámoff pretended not to see him. It is a curious fact that until that day both men had kept aloof from each other, as they had nothing in common. They worked in different shops, belonged to different departments, and lived in different prisons. The little convict's name was Boulkin. Varlámoff grinned with pleasure when he beheld me sitting on my pallet by the stove. He stopped short, drew himself up, and staggered towards me, trying to assume a dignified and graceful gait. When he could go no further, he stopped in front of me, and running his fingers along the chords, sang, or rather recited, the following verses, slightly tapping the floor with his heel:

> My love's face is round, my love's face is white,
> And she sings like a nightingale in the dark night.

This innocent song produced rather a remarkable effect on Boulkin. He tossed up his arms and screamed at the top of his voice, addressing us: 'That's a lie, my brothers. Don't believe him ever, he never speaks the truth—never, never.'

'Allow me, old gentleman, Alexander Petróvitch,' said Varlámoff, looking at me with a cunning smile and coming so near that I began to entertain serious fears lest he should take it into his head to embrace me. He was quite drunk. The expression, 'Allow me, old gentleman'—i.e. to present my respects to you—is frequently used by the common people in Siberia. 'Old gentleman' is a term of affection, sometimes even of flattery.

'Well, Varlámoff, how do you do?'

'Oh, so, so. Excuse me, but I could not help getting drunk; it is a holiday, you know.'

He always spoke in a sing-song tone.

'It's a lie, it's a lie!' shouted Boulkin in a perfect agony of despair, thumping on the pallets with his fists. But the other one seemed to have made up his mind not to heed him. There was something irresistibly comical about the whole thing, as Boulkin had attached himself to Varlámoff ever since the morning, apparently from no other reason except that Varlámoff told lies as he seemed to think. One might have thought from his behaviour that he was to be held answerable for all Varlámoff's shortcomings and faults. And all the time the other one never looked at him once.

'It's a lie, a lie, a lie! It's a lie, every word of it!' screamed Boulkin.

'What's that to you?' answered the convicts, laughing.

'I must tell you, Alexander Petróvitch, that I was a very handsome fellow when I was young, and all the girls went clean out of their senses about me,' suddenly burst out Varlámoff.

'It's a lie, a lie!' interrupted Boulkin, with a howl.

The convicts laughed at his despair.

'And didn't I show off before them. I used to wear a red shirt and velveteen sharovary,[1] and lie on the sofa like a gentleman, and drink like a Swede.'

[1] Wide trousers, in shape not unlike Turkish trousers. They are worn with top-boots.

'It's a lie!' remarked Boulkin, in a very decided tone.

'You see, at that time my father had just died, and left me a stone house with two storeys. Well, in two years I got rid of both of them, and had nothing left except the gates, without any posts to hang them on to. Money is like pigeons, and comes and goes like them.'

'It is a lie!' says Boulkin, in a more decided tone than before.

'Then I thought I would write a dutiful and repentant letter to my friends from here, hoping that they might send me some money. You see they always accused me of being a disrespectful son, and not obeying my father. It is now seven years since I sent that letter off.'

'And you never got an answer?' asked I, laughing.

'No,' said he, suddenly bursting into a fit of laughter, and nearly touching my face with his nose. 'Did you know, Alexander Petróvitch, that I had a sweetheart here?'

'You? A sweetheart?'

'Yes. Onoúfrieff was saying the other day that, although his sweetheart was plain, yet she had fine dresses, while mine was handsome, but a beggar.'

'Is that true?'

'Yes, yes, she is a beggar!' replied he, roaring with laughter.

It was well known in the prison that he had a *liaison* with a beggar woman, and had only given her ten copecks in six months.

'Do you want anything,' said I, wishing to get rid of him at last.

He was silent for a moment, then, looking piteously at me, he said coaxingly, 'Won't you give me a trifle to drink your health, Alexander Petróvitch? I have tasted nothing but tea to-day,' added he, with great effusion, pocketing the money, 'and I had so much of it that it made me feel quite sick and faint.'

During this last scene, Boulkin's despair seemed to have reached its climax. He gesticulated madly, and nearly burst into tears.

'Good people,' screamed he, addressing the whole room in his agony, 'look at him. It is a lie! Every single word that he has spoken to-day has been a lie, a lie, a lie!'

'But what is that to you, you old fool?' shout the convicts, who cannot understand why he should be so much distressed at Varlámoff's lies.'

'He must not tell lies!' shrieks Boulkin, his eyes sparkling with anger, and drumming on the pallets with all his might. 'I will not let him tell lies.'

They all laughed at him. Varlámoff takes the money, thanks me, and, writhing his uncouth body into all kinds of grotesque contortions, hastens away to the tapster. Suddenly he seems to become aware, for the first time, of Boulkin's presence.

'Come with me,' says he, stopping on the threshold as if he really needed him.

'Little knob,' adds he scornfully, stepping back to let poor little sorrowful Boulkin go past him, and

again runs his fingers along the chords of his instrument.

But why should I go on describing this Pandemonium? At last the day has come to an end. The convicts have fallen asleep on their pallets, but they talk more in their sleep to-day than usual. A few card-parties are still going on in the corners. The long-expected holiday is over, and we go back to our work-day life to-morrow.

CHAPTER XI.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

THE first dramatic performance took place on the night of December 27. The actors had, undoubtedly, had a good deal of trouble in getting everything ready; but, as they had taken it all upon themselves and kept their own secret, we were quite in the dark as to how they were getting on, what they were doing, and even what the play was going to be. The greater part of the working hours during the last three days had been spent in more or less successful attempts to beg or borrow the necessary articles of clothing. Bakloushin expressed his satisfaction with the present state of things by snapping his fingers every time he met me. Even our Major was in a more peaceful frame of mind than he had been for some time past; and it was a source of deep speculation for us whether he knew anything about our dramatic performance, and what he was going to do about it. Had the actors applied to him formally for leave, and had he granted it? or was there a kind of tacit compromise between him and the convicts that he would not interfere with their plans, provided no breach of discipline was committed? I, for one, am inclined to

think that such was the case, as indeed he could not possibly have been ignorant of the preparations; but that he preferred to remain passive, knowing from experience that if he had prohibited it the convicts might do something worse. Anyhow, the sergeant-at-arms did not interfere with the preliminary arrangements, and that was all the men wanted. I must add here that they were so taken up with the grand event, and so grateful for its having been permitted, that not a single serious disturbance or robbery took place in the prison during the holidays. I have frequently seen a quarrel come to an end suddenly, and the parties that were concerned in it pacified by the simple remark that if the Major heard about it he would prohibit the performance.

The stage could be put up and taken down in about a quarter of an hour. The performance did not last above an hour and a half, and, if anything had happened to prevent it at the last moment, everything might have been cleared away in a minute or two. The dresses were hidden away out of sight in the actors' boxes. But before I go into any further details about the stage arrangements, the costumes, etc., I must say a few words about the programme.

No playbill had originally been issued, but Bakloushin wrote one out on the third night of the play for the officers and the gentry who had honoured us with their presence on the first night. The latter consisted of the officer on duty, who generally made his appearance, and the head engineer, who had come once. It was confidently believed that the fame of

our private theatricals would spread far and wide, and even excite the curiosity of the town-people, who, alas, did not rejoice in a standing theatre. A vague rumour, it is true, had reached us once that there had been amateur theatricals in the town, but that was all we knew about it. The convicts were like children, glad and proud of the slightest success. 'Who knows,' they would say to themselves and to each other, 'who knows but the general and the other officers may hear about our performance and come and see it, and then they will see what the poor convicts can do. Our play is not like those vulgar soldiers' plays, with their stuffed dolls and swimming boats, and dancing bears and goats. We are real live actors, and we act plays that have been written for gentlefolks, and that's more than they have in their town. They say that a play was once acted at General Abrossimoff's, and that there is going to be another performance there. To be sure, their dresses will be better than ours; but as for their talk, it won't be a bit better. And perhaps the Governor of the town may hear about it, and wish to come and see our play.' In a word, the imagination of the convicts became so inflamed with their first success that they almost began to expect that they would be rewarded for their wonderful performance, and perhaps even obtain their liberty. At the same time, they were fully aware of the incongruity of their hopes, and laughed at each other for indulging in them. They were children yet in every respect, although some of these children were over forty years old. In spite of the lack of playbills I knew what plays were going to

be acted. The first piece was called 'The Rivals; or, Filátka and Meróshka.' Bakloushin took care to inform me, a week before the performance, that he had taken the part of Filátka, and that he was going to favour us with such a rendering of the character as had never been seen even in St. Petersburg. He strutted about the prison, talking about himself and his accomplishments, in the most bare-faced, and, at the same time, good-humoured manner, and occasionally spouting some favourite passage from his part, which never failed to throw his audience into convulsions of laughter, whether it was comical or not. Still, the majority of the convicts thought it beneath their dignity to appear too much interested in the performance, and maintained a certain reserve on the subject; and only those among them whose authority was too well established to be shaken by a violation of prison etiquette, and a few of the youngest and greenest fellows, dared to show their delight at Bakloushin's dramatic outbursts and wonderful tales about the play. On the eve of the first representation, however, even those who had pretended to care least about it suddenly manifested a most lively interest in the performance. Bakloushin assured me that the cast of the play was an unusually good one, and that we were even going to have a curtain! Sirótkin was to be Filátka's betrothed; 'and you will see yourself how beautiful he looks in his woman's clothes,' added he, winking and smacking his lips. 'The rich and benevolent lady has got a dress with flounces, and a cape and a parasol; and the rich and benevolent gentleman will

appear in an officer's uniform with epaulets, and a walking-stick.'

The second piece was named 'Kedril the Glutton.' The title roused my curiosity, and I tried, but in vain, to find out more about it. All I could learn about its origin was that it had not been taken from a book, but from a manuscript copy which was in the possession of an invalided sergeant, who lived somewhere in the suburbs, and who had perhaps acted in it at some soldiers' private theatricals. There exist in our distant towns and provinces many plays and dramas which have never been printed and are perfectly unknown to the general public, although they form part of the *répertoire* of the popular theatres in certain parts of Russia. They are to be found chiefly in the hands of soldiers and factory workers in certain manufacturing cities; and perhaps even in many a poor little unknown town or village, or in the servant-halls of large country houses. I believe that many old dramatical pieces owe their existence merely to the fact of having been copied and recopied by servants. It was the custom in old times for rich people, both in Moscow and in the country, to have their own private theatres, where the actors were serfs. From those stages has sprung our popular dramatic art, and the traces of its origin are unmistakable among our population.

As I have said before, all I could learn about 'Kedril the Glutton' was, that demons appear on the stage and escort the hero to hell. The last piece was to be 'A Pantomime, with Music.'

The actors were about fifteen in number, a good-

looking set, who kept a great deal together, and had private rehearsals in all sorts of queer out-of-the-way nooks and places.

On week-days the doors were locked early, generally at nightfall; but during the Christmas[1] holidays they had been allowed to remain open for a few hours longer. Every day towards evening a deputation has waited on the officer on duty with the humble petition 'to permit the performance and not to lock the doors too early,' adding that there had been a performance the night before, that the doors had been left open, and that no disturbances had taken place. Upon this I suppose that the officer reasoned thus: 'After all they have kept their word hitherto and behaved well, and why should not they do so to-day. And if I forbid the performance, who knows but they may play me some nasty trick, and get us all into disgrace?' But the worthy officer had also another reason for granting their request. Watching convicts is by no means a very amusing occupation, and here was a chance of spending a pleasant evening, and seeing a real play acted, not by soldiers but by convict prisoners, who are queer people after all. And the officer on duty goes to the play with the rest of us.

If a superior officer should come into the guard-room unexpectedly during his absence, and ask where he was, he would be informed that the officer in question had gone into the cells to call the roll and

[1] Christmas holidays last for twelve days in Russia, beginning on Christmas Day and ending on Twelfth Night. They are called the Svyátki, or 'little holidays.'

lock the doors, which was true after all. And our request was graciously granted, and the doors not locked till late.

About 7 P.M. Petróff came to fetch me, and we started to go. There was hardly a soul left in our cell except the old Dissenter and the Poles. The latter could not be prevailed upon to come till the very last performance, which took place on January 4, and not until they had been repeatedly assured that the plays were amusing, and that they had nothing to fear. When at last they did come, the convicts received them very politely, and showed them to the best places. The Tcherkesses and Issaï Fomitch were delighted. The latter had paid three copecks each time until the last, when he put ten copecks into the plate, and looked round with a face beaming with happiness. There were no fixed prices, but a collection was made each time to cover the expenses and provide refreshments for the actors. Petróff told me that I would get one of the best places because I was known to have more money than the rest, and therefore expected to give a larger contribution, and also because I was rather a connoisseur in the histrionic art. Everything happened as he had said; but I must first describe the stage and the place where the public stood and sat. The stage had been erected in our military prison, which was fifteen feet long and had two doors—one opened directly into a little passage, whence a few steps led into the courtyard, the other door led into an adjoining room. The middle of the room was empty, as the benches ran along the walls. That part of the room which

was nearest to the outer door had been allotted to the public, and the other part set apart for the stage. I was very much struck by the curtain first of all. It was about ten feet long, and stretched right across the room, and had been elaborately painted to represent a conglomeration of trees, bowers, ponds, and stars. It had been manufactured partly of old linen rags, and partly of new bits of cloth, which had been contributed by, or begged from, the convicts. Old shirts and linen rags, which served in lieu of stockings, had been sewn together to form one large sheet, and as this was still too small for the room, small bits of paper, which had also been begged from divers offices, had been added to make it larger. Our painters had done their best, and the effect was truly wonderful. Even the most fastidious men were delighted with it, and when it came to the play they went into ecstasies of rapture. The illumination consisted of several tallow candles, which had been cut in small pieces for the sake of economy. In front of the curtain, facing it, stood two benches which had been borrowed from the kitchen for the occasion, and between them and the curtain three or four chairs had been placed in case any of the higher officers should come in. The benches were occupied by the sergeant, clerks, engineers, and other persons who belonged to the Governor's staff. We had a good many visitors—some nights they were more numerous and others less so—but on the last night of the performance not a place remained unoccupied on the benches. The convicts were crowded into the space between the benches and the wall,

bareheaded, out of respect for their visitors, and dressed in their jackets or fur coats, in spite of the stifling hot atmosphere. As there was not room enough for them to stand, they literally sat upon each other, especially in the back rows. Some had climbed upon the pallets or squeezed in between the decorations, and others who had not been fortunate enough to obtain even a small place in the room, were enjoying the play from behind the stage. The crowd was terrific, and could only be compared to the one I had lately seen in the bathroom. The door which led into the passage was open, and even this was full of people, who stood there regardless of the cold.

Petróff and myself were shown to the front, where we got a place just behind the benches, and could hear and see well. The reason why we were thus honoured was self-evident. They knew that I had frequented the theatres a good deal in my time; besides, Bakloushin had frequently come to me for advice, and listened to my suggestions with deference—therefore I deserved a good place.

The room itself presented a curious sight. Several men had brought with them big logs of wood from the kitchen, which they leaned against the wall, and, perching themselves on the top, grasped with both hands the shoulders of some one in the row before them to steady themselves, and remained in this position for two hours. Others had managed to get on to the narrow ridge which ran along the stove and stood there. Another crowd occupied the pallets, which were considered first-rate seats. Five men had clambered upon the stove, and viewed the

play from above. Many who had come too late, or been unable to procure a good place, sat on the window-sills on the other side of the room. There was no rioting or quarrelling, the men were evidently anxious to show themselves to their best before the quality.

At last something was heard moving on the stage, the curtain began to flap, and the band struck up. This band consisted of eight performers, who were seated on the pallets to the right of the stage—two of them played the violin (one fiddle had been borrowed from somebody in the fortress, the other belonged to a convict prisoner), three the balalaïka (they had made their instruments themselves), two the guitar, and one rattled and jingled and thumped on a tambourine; two harmonicas also took part in the performance. The fiddles screeched, the guitars were wretched, but the balalaïkas were first-rate instruments. I have never seen anything like the rapidity with which the fingers of the players flew along the strings. The overture was a national dance. In certain places the balalaïka players struck with their knuckles the woodwork of their instruments. One of the guitar players played well—it was the parricide. To tell the truth, I had never yet had the faintest idea of what can be done with simple instruments, and was astonished at the execution and the spirit of the whole performance.

At last the curtain rose. There was a general stir; the people in the back rows stood on tiptoe; some one tumbled down from his log; all mouths were opened with expectation, all eyes fixed on the

stage, the deepest silence prevailed, and the performance began.

My immediate neighbour was Aleï. He, his brothers, and the other Tcherkesses all stood together in a group. They grew to like the theatre very much, and ended by going nearly every night. I have often noticed how fond Mahomedans are of dramatic performances. On the floor by them squatted Issaï Fomitch, who, from the moment the curtain rose, seemed to have lost all senses except those of hearing and seeing, and to expect wonderful things. I should have been sorry for him if he had been disappointed. Aleï's sweet face wore such an expression of pure childlike joy that it gave me pleasure to look at him. I remember that every time some particularly witty repartee was greeted with shouts of laughter from the public, I turned round to see how he liked it. But he never saw me! At this moment I doubt if he was aware of the very fact of my existence. On the left, not far from me, stood an old convict who had never been known to smile in all the years he had been in the prison. He, too, noticed Aleï, and I caught him repeatedly turning to look at him with the faintest shadow of a smile flitting over his face. He used to call him 'Aleï Semenytch,' I know not why. The first piece was, as I have said, 'Filátka and Meróshka.' Bakloushin was indeed a first-rate actor. I had seen the piece several times, both in St. Petersburg and Moscow; but Bakloushin surpassed the best actors in both places in his rendering of Filátka. I was even more amused in watching the public, whose enthusiasm

knew no bounds. Poor fellows! They had nothing to look forward to except long years of a life as monotonous as the dripping of the rain on a gloomy, chilly autumn day, and to-night they had been allowed to forget their misery for a moment. They had shaken off for an hour or two the heavy stupor which paralysed their minds, and were once more free human beings, full of life and the enjoyment of it. One man nudged his neighbour to attract his attention, and without even looking at him, so completely was he absorbed in what was going on. Another, in the midst of a comical scene, suddenly turned round and faced the crowd, as if to see whether it had duly appreciated the repartee, then, waving his hand, turned back eagerly towards the stage. The costumes were a source of great interest. It was quite a new thing to see Ván'ka Otpétuy or Netzvetáeff or Bakloushin in plain clothes. 'He is a convict like us,' some one would suddenly remark about one of the actors; 'you can hear his chains clanking under his clothes, and just look at him now. Doesn't he look like a gentleman in his dress-coat and cloak and round hat? And he wears a false moustache and a wig, actually a wig! And now, look! look! he has taken a red pocket-handkerchief from his pocket and is fanning himself with it.'

The 'benevolent gentleman' appeared on the stage dressed in a very old aide-de-camp uniform, with epaulets and a military-looking cap, and was greeted with tremendous applause. There had been two candidates for that part, and they quarrelled just like boys, as both wished to appear in public in an

officer's uniform with epaulets! The other actors had at last been obliged to interfere, and the dispute had been decided in favour of Netzvetáeff, not because he was better or more gentlemanly-looking than his colleague, but because he had promised to carry a stick in his hand and flourish it, and draw figures on the ground with it like a real gentleman. This part of the acting Ván'ka Otpétuy could not do, never having seen a real live gentleman in all his born days. So when Netzvetáeff came out with his lady on his arm, he did little else but draw figures on the floor with a small walking-stick which he had borrowed from some one. I suppose that many years ago, when he was a ragged, barefooted boy who hung about his master's house, he may have seen a well-dressed gentleman flourishing a walking-stick, and been greatly impressed by the sight. He was so absorbed in drawing figures on the ground that he never once looked up, and all the time he was on the stage kept his eyes fixed on the end of the stick. The 'benevolent lady' also presented a very remarkable and striking appearance. She was attired in an old draggled muslin gown, rather the worse for wear, and had a calico nightcap on her head which was tied under her chin. Her neck and arms were bare, her face painted pink and white, and she carried a parasol in one hand and a fan made of coloured paper in the other, with which she kept fanning herself with great vehemence. She was received with roars of laughter, which evidently upset her gravity, as she repeatedly went into fits of laughter herself during the performance. She was

represented by Ivanoff. Sirótkin looked charming in the character of a young girl. The couplets were well sung, and the whole piece went off to everybody's satisfaction.

The overture was repeated in the interval between the first and second piece, and the curtain rose again. The second piece, according to the programme, was 'Kedril the Glutton.' Kedril reminded me a little of Don Juan—that is, the last scene or two of it, when both the servant and the master are carried bodily off by devils. I suppose that the piece we saw was only a fragment of the original farce, as it was impossible to make anything of it. The scene is laid in a wretched roadside inn somewhere in Russia. In the opening scene a gentleman in a great-coat and battered round hat is shown into a room by the landlord. He is followed by his servant Kedril, who appears carrying his master's portmanteau in one hand and a roast fowl wrapped up in brown paper in the other. He wears a short fur coat and laced cap, and is the hero of the piece. The landlord retires after considerately informing his guest that the room he has given him is haunted by evil spirits. The gentleman, who seems very much pre-occupied with his own thoughts, orders Kedril to unpack the portmanteau and get supper ready. The servant is a coward as well as a glutton, and, having heard that the room is haunted, he turns pale with fear, trembles like a leaf, and even makes one or two attempts to run away, but is prevented from carrying out his desire by the sight of the roast fowl and the fear lest his master should catch him in the act of

decamping. While he is busy unpacking, his master paces the room in a state of great agitation, and informs the public that to-night his wanderings have reached an end at last. Kedril, who is squatting on the floor before the portmanteau, listens to his master's monologue, makes faces, and throws the audience into convulsions by his remarks. He does not in the least feel sorry for his master, but, having heard something about the devils, he would like to know more about them, and begins to ask questions on the subject. His master tells him finally that some time ago, being in great trouble, he had applied to the devil for help, and that the latter came to his rescue after making him agree to the usual conditions. His term had expired to-day, and this very night the devil might possibly come for his soul. On hearing this Kedril is frightened nearly out of his wits; but his master remains calm and self-possessed, and commands him to get the supper ready. The word 'supper' has a wonderful effect on Kedril; he takes the fowl out of the brown paper parcel and produces a bottle of wine from the portmanteau, but cannot resist the temptation to take a little bite out of the fowl. The public screams with laughter. Suddenly the door begins to creak, the shutters swing to and fro in the wind, Kedril trembles with fear, and almost mechanically puts into his mouth a huge piece of fowl which is too big for him to swallow. Another burst of laughter greets this marvellous feat. 'Is supper ready?' asks his master, stopping short in his perambulations. 'Yes, sir—I—am just getting it ready,' says Kedril, sitting down at

the table and helping himself coolly to the fowl, thus making a fool of his master, to the infinite delight of the audience. He goes on eating greedily, keeping all the time an eye on his master, and every time the latter turns round he takes the fowl in his hand and hides himself under the table. Having at last satisfied his own stomach, he begins to think of his master. 'Kedril, when will supper be ready?' cries the master. 'It is on the table, sir,' answers Kedril, and suddenly to his surprise becomes aware of the fact that there is nothing left on the plate except one drumstick. Happily his master is too much pre-occupied to notice this little circumstance, and sits down to the table, while Kedril, throwing a napkin over his arm, takes his place behind his master's chair. Each word, each gesture of Kedril, as he winks at the audience, pointing to his master, evidently rejoicing over his trick, provoke the mirth of the audience. No sooner, however, has the gentleman begun to eat than the devils appear on the stage. A side-door opens and admits a white figure carrying a lantern on its shoulders instead of a head. It is followed by a similar figure, also with a lantern on its shoulders and a scythe in its hand. Nobody expresses the slightest wonder at this unusual representation of evil spirits. The master bravely tells the demons that he is ready to follow them. Not so Kedril, who disappears under the table, taking the bottle of wine with him in his hurry. The devils disappear for a moment, Kedril comes out of his hiding-place, and his master eats another mouthful of fowl, when he is again interrupted by three devils,

who suddenly burst into the room and carry him off to the lower regions, 'Kedril, save me! oh, save me!' screams the unfortunate man, but the servant is deaf to his entreaties. This time he has taken not only the bottle, but also the plate with him in his retreat under the table. When everything is quiet, he comes out of his hiding-place, looks cautiously round, and winks at the audience. Then, sitting down in his late master's place, he says in a loud whisper, 'My master's gone—I'm all alone now!'

Everybody laughs because he says he is alone; after a pause he adds in another whisper, winking at the audience with an expression of great bliss on his face, 'The devil has taken him!'

Here the audience's delight knows no bounds. Besides, these few words were so well spoken, with such a semi-sarcastic, semi-triumphant expression, that they fully deserved to be applauded.

But Kedril's happiness does not last long. He has just poured some wine into his glass, and is in the act of raising it to his lips, when the evil spirits reappear, and coming up softly lay hold of him from behind. Kedril screams with all his might and main, but is too much terrified to look round. Neither can he defend himself, for both hands are occupied with the bottle and the glass, from which he cannot make up his mind to part. There he sits for about half a minute, staring at the public with his mouth wide open, the very image of terror. The piece ends by his being dragged away, clinging to his bottle to the last, screaming and kicking. His yells

are heard behind the scenes, the curtain drops, the audience is delighted, and the band strikes up the Kamarinskaya.[1]

It begins pianissimo and very slowly, but gradually increasing, both in rapidity and loudness, and the audience are breathless with the excitement. I only wish Glinka might have heard it. The *pantomime* begins, and the band plays all the time. The stage represents the interior of a cottage. In one corner sits the miller mending a piece of harness, in the other his wife spinning. Sirótkin is the wife, Netzvetáeff is the husband. I must observe here, once for all, that our decorations were very primitive, and left a wide scope to one's imagination. Across the back of the stage a carpet or horse-rug had been hung, a wretched screen was all the decorations on the right-hand side, and there was even less on the left-hand side, seeing that there was no scenery at all, so that the pallets were visible. But the audience is unpretending, and quite willing to imagine anything they are told to imagine. If they say it is a garden, it is one, and if they say it is a room, why shouldn't it be so? Sirótkin looks a very pretty little woman. A few complimentary remarks are heard among the audience. The miller, having finished his mending, lays it down, takes up his hat and whip, and approaching his wife, gives her to understand, by pantomime, that he is going out for a short time, but that if she should receive any one in his absence——, and he raises the whip with a significant gesture. She nods her head, and is evi-

[1] A national dance.

dently well acquainted with the whip, as she is somewhat given to flirting. The husband leaves the room, and his wife shakes her fist at him behind his back. There is a knock at the door presently, and in walks a neighbour. He is also a miller, and wears a kaftan, and has a long beard. He carries a red kerchief in his hand, which he presents to the wife. She takes it laughingly, but, just as he is going to kiss her, there is another knock at the door. What is to be done? After some deliberation she hides him under the table, and again betakes herself to her spinning. This time the visitor is a clerk, habited in some old regimentals. Hitherto the pantomime had gone on beautifully, every movement and gesture being perfectly natural. I could not help admiring the actors, and thinking sadly how much talent is wasted and crushed and trodden down in Russia. But, unfortunately, the convict who played the clerk had either acted before on some small stage in a provincial town, or else in private theatricals, and seemed to have somehow or other got hold of the idea that he alone had acquired the art of moving about on the stage, and that none of our actors knew anything about acting. Accordingly he stalked about the stage after the fashion of the heroes in old classical pieces, as they used to walk fifty years ago—taking a long stride, then, without moving the other foot, stopping suddenly with his legs wide apart, throwing his head and body back, glancing proudly round, and then at last taking another step forward and going through the same evolutions again.

Hardly had he managed to get to the middle of

the stage when another knock was heard at the door. What was to be done with the clerk? Happily there stood in a corner an open box, into which he got precipitately, the woman closing the lid. The third lover is a Bramin in full dress. The spectators explode with laughter. The Bramin is played by Koshkin, and very well too. He expresses his love by lifting his hands to heaven, and folding them over his heart, but only a short time is given him to express all he thinks. A thundering knock nearly shatters the door. It is the master of the house, who has come back. His wife is frightened out of her wits the Bramin rushes frantically about, trying to hide himself in all sorts of odd nooks and places. At last she pushes him behind a cupboard, and, forgetting in her terror to open the door, sits down to her spinning, drawing a thread which she does not hold in her hand, and turning the distaff which she has not picked up from the floor. After repeated knockings her husband finally bursts open the door with a furious kick, and walks straight up to his wife, threatening her with his whip. He has been watching her through the window, and tells her, by signs, that he knows how many lovers she has hidden in the room, after which he proceeds to hunt for them. The neighbour is discovered first, and expelled by kicks. The frightened clerk tries to run away, raises the lid of the box with his head, and thus attracts the attention of the husband, who accelerates his departure by sundry applications of the whip, and the love-sick swain hops about the stage in a highly unclassical manner. Now comes the Bramin's turn.

The infuriated husband looks vainly in every corner of the room, till at last he discovers him behind the cupboard, when he bows politely to his unbidden guest and proceeds to drag him out by his beard. The Bramin struggles, trying to defend himself, screaming, 'You wretch! you rascal!' (the only words that were spoken in the pantomime), but the husband goes on pulling and pushing and kicking him in spite of his screams. The wife, seeing that her turn has come, throws down her spinning and runs out of the room, to the delight of the audience. Aleï shakes me frantically by the hand without looking at me, shouting, 'Look, look, the Bramin, the Bramin!' and holds his sides with laughter. The curtain falls and rises again, and another scene begins.

But why should I go on describing them all? There were some three or four more, and they were all very amusing. I do not know if the convicts had arranged and invented all the pantomimes themselves; but, at any rate, each actor improvised some slight variations every time, so that on each of the following nights the same part was given slightly altered, and perhaps improved.

The last scene ended with a ballet. A funeral procession moves across the stage, and is met by a Bramin and his suite, who tries to revive the corpse by various exorcisms, but in vain. Suddenly the tune of the popular song, 'The Sun is setting,' is heard behind the scenes—the dead man sits up in his coffin, and all dance for joy. The Bramin and the corpse execute a Braminical *pas de deux*.

This is the finale of to-night's performance. Everybody goes away in high good-humour, praising the actors and thanking the sergeant-at-arms, and very much pleased with their evening. Nobody feels inclined to get up a quarrel to-night, and soon everybody is peacefully asleep on his pallet. I happen to wake up in the middle of the night. The old man is still praying on the stove, where he will remain till daybreak. Aleï sleeps quietly by my side. As I gaze upon his sweet, childlike face, I remember how he joked about the play with his brothers before lying down on his hard bed. I raise my head and look at my sleeping comrades by the dim light of a thin candle. I see their poor, worn faces, their miserable beds, the squalor and wretchedness that surround them, and try to persuade myself that I am not dreaming a hideous dream. No, I am broad awake; some one in the corner over there has groaned in his sleep, another has moved his hand—you hear the sound of chains; a third sleeper has started up, and murmurs something, and the grandfather on the stove prays for 'all orthodox Christians,' and I hear him repeating, in low, measured tones, 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon us!'

'I shall only be here a few years after all,' thought I, laying my head once more on the pillow.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOSPITAL.

I FELL ill soon after the Christmas holidays, and was taken to our military hospital. It was a long, one-storied building, painted yellow, which stood by itself half a verst from the prison, in the midst of a large courtyard, surrounded by the outhouses, and two or three cottages where the medical officers lived. The wards were all in the principal building. There were several of them, but only two were allotted to the convicts, and were consequently much crowded, especially in summer-time when temporary beds had often to be erected and squeezed in somehow or other between the others. A great number of our patients were military prisoners who were awaiting their trial, and soldiers from the so-called reformatory battalion—a curious institution, where soldiers whose behaviour has been unsatisfactory, or who have committed some trifling breach of discipline, are sent for two years or more, and which they leave as professed criminals. A convict who wished to be admitted into the hospital reported himself in the morning to the sergeant-at-arms, who put down his name in a book, and sent him with the book and accompanied by an escort to the Field-

lazaretto, where the men who have applied to see the doctor are examined by him, and, if they are really ill, have their names put down on the hospital list.

I went to the hospital about 2 P.M., when all the other convicts had gone to their afternoon work. The patient generally took with him all the ready money he had, a large piece of bread—as neither dinner nor supper is provided for him on the day of his entering the hospital—a small pipe, a tobacco-pouch and tinder-box, the latter articles being carefully hidden away in his boots.

I must confess that I entered the hospital-yard not without a certain feeling of curiosity, as this side of convict life was practically unknown to me.

The day was warm and dull—one of those days when a building like a hospital is apt to appear more dreary and official-looking than usual. We walked into a kind of reception-room, where two other convicts were already waiting with their escorts. On one side of the room stood two tin baths. After some time had elapsed the feldsheer[1] made his appearance at last, stared at us haughtily, and then went off lazily to report us to the doctor. The latter came at once, examined us carefully, and, after saying a few kind words to each of us, gave us each a ticket on which our name was inscribed. All the further particulars—viz., the diagnosis, medical treatment, and dietary were left to the assistant who

[1] A surgeon who performs the more menial offices, bleeds and lances the patients, etc. There are special schools in Russia where the feldsheers are trained. They have a diploma, but no medical degree.

was in charge of the convict wards. I knew from what I had heard before that the convicts liked their doctors. 'They are fathers to us,' replied they in answer to my questions about the hospital, etc. We were then told to undress, the linen and clothes which we had worn hitherto were taken away, and we put on a kind of hospital uniform, consisting, besides the necessary underclothing, of stocking, slippers, a cap, and a thick dressing-gown of buff-coloured cloth which seemed to me to be lined with sticking-plaster. It was inexpressibly dirty, but nevertheless I felt grateful even for this small comfort which I had been deprived of for so long. These preliminaries over, we were conducted into the convict wards, which lay at the furthermost end of a very long, lofty, and clean passage. Everything looked bright and clean, at least outwardly, or perhaps it only seemed to me so compared to the convict prison. The two other patients entered a door to the left, and I stepped before another door to the right. It was fastened with an iron bolt, and watched by two sentinels with guns. The sergeant-at-arms gave the order to let me pass, and I found myself in a long narrow room with two rows of beds in it. There were fourteen beds on each side, and all of them occupied with the exception of two or three. The bedsteads were of wood and painted green, an ominous colour which is only too well known to every Russian, as, through some mysterious coincidence, such beds are invariably inhabited by bugs. I took possession of a bed in a corner on that side of the room where the windows were. As I have

said before, there were convicts from our prison in the ward. Some of these knew me personally, while others had seen me before, but had never spoken to me; but by far the greater number of the patients came from the reformatory battalion or from other departments. Very few of the men were ill enough to be in bed; the rest, who were either only indisposed or else reconvalescent, sat about on their beds, or walked up and down in the passage between the two rows of beds. A close, nauseous smell pervaded the whole room, the air was impregnated with unpleasant exhalations and the odour of drugs, although a fire was kept up in the stove nearly all day long. My bed was covered with a striped case, which I removed, and beheld a woollen counterpane lined with canvas and coarse bedclothes of very doubtful cleanliness. A small table stood by the bedside, on which were placed a jug and pewter dish, modestly concealed under a diminutive towel. There was a shelf under the table where such of the prisoners as could afford to drink tea kept their teapots, and the rest their jugs of kvas, etc. Almost everybody in the wards, including the consumptive patients, kept a pipe and tobacco-pouch hidden under their beds. The doctors and officers on duty never searched them, and if by chance they caught a patient smoking they pretended not to see it. The patients themselves took good care not to be caught, and generally smoked into the stove, except at night, when they indulged in this pleasure lying in their beds, but then hardly anybody ever entered the ward at night except perhaps occasionally the officer on duty.

This was the first time in my life that I was ill in a hospital, and I felt interested in the novelty of my situation. I soon became aware, however, that I too was an object of great interest to my neighbours. They had heard about me, and scanned me curiously with that air of superiority which senior schoolboys are apt to assume towards a new boy who has come to school for the first time in his life. The bed on my right was occupied by a prisoner who had been under trial for a whole year. He was the natural son of a discharged captain, had served in some Government office as clerk, and finally joined a gang of coiners, but had succeeded in evading his punishment by making the doctors believe that he had an aneurysm. He actually lay in bed for two whole years, although nothing was the matter with him, and was then sent to some other hospital in T——. He was a stout, square-built fellow, about twenty-eight years old—a shrewd, impudent, self-conscious wretch, who had persuaded himself that he was the most honest and truthful being in the world, and perfectly innocent of the crime imputed to him. This agreeable young man spoke to me at once, and after duly informing me that he was the son of a captain, and therefore of gentle birth, asked me several questions, and initiated me into the internal arrangements of the hospital. The next who spoke to me was a grey-haired soldier from the reformatory battalion, Tchekóunoff by name, who told me that he had known many of the gentlemen convicts who had been in the hospital long before my time, and repeated a whole string of names. I could see by his face that he was

not speaking the truth, and that he had invented all the names with the object of ingratiating himself with me, as he supposed that I was not altogether without cash. I had brought with me a little parcel of tea and sugar, but had no teapot, M—— having promised to send me one the next day by a convict who was working in the hospital. Tchekóunoff at once offered to get me a teapot and make me some tea. He managed to get an iron kettle somewhere and a cup, boiled the water, made the tea, and in a word waited upon me with great zeal, which immediately gave rise to a great many sarcastic remarks from a patient named Oustiánzeff, whose bed was opposite mine. He was the young soldier I mentioned in the first part of these Memoirs as having taken brandy in which he had previously soaked snuff, and who was now dying of consumption in the hospital. He had hitherto remained silent, breathing with difficulty, looking fixedly and seriously at me, and watching every movement of Tchekóunoff with great indignation. At last he could not suppress his rage any longer and broke out.

'So the serf has found his master,' said he slowly, in a weak voice, gasping for breath. He was dying then.

Tchekóunoff turned round angrily.

'Who is the serf?' asked he scornfully.

'You,' replied the sick man, with the air of one who had a right to scold Tchekóunoff, and had even been appointed to do it.

'Am I a serf?'

'Yes—you, you, you, you! Hear him, good

people, he will not believe me when I tell him it is so!'

'Mind your own business. Don't you see that the gentleman is not accustomed to wait upon himself? Why should I not help him, you shaggy-faced fool?'

'Whom did you call a shaggy-faced fool?'

'You are a shaggy-faced fool!'

'I a shaggy-faced fool?'

'Yes, you—who else? Did you think, perhaps, that you are a beauty?'

'If I am a shaggy-faced fool, your face is like a crow's egg——'

'I say you are a shaggy-faced fool. Why don't you die quietly now that God has killed you, instead of bothering other people? What do you want?'

'I will tell you what I want. I had rather bow to a boot than a wooden shoe. My father always said so. I, I——' Here he was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing, which left him so weak that he could only express his indignation by waving his hand frantically at us. The cold perspiration stood on his narrow forehead; he looked daggers at us, but was unable to speak.

Tchekóunoff shrugged his shoulders and went on getting my tea.

I could not help feeling that I had been in some measure the cause of this sudden outbreak of passion.

Nobody would have found fault with Tchekóunoff for making himself useful to me, and trying to earn a copeck or two. But there was the old story again—they hated me. Oustiánzeff felt insulted by my drinking tea and giving myself airs, as he thought, pre-

tending not to be able to do without a servant, although I had never asked any one to help me. On the contrary, I wished to show them that I was not a 'white-handed,' delicately-nurtured gentleman, and even prided myself not a little on having so far succeeded in ridding myself of my old aristocratic habits. But——I really cannot say why it should always happen thus, but I never could refuse the proffered services of all my different helpers who attached themselves to me, and ended by ruling so completely over me that I was their servant and they my masters, while it was generally believed that I was their lord and master, and could not do without them. I always felt vexed with myself for my weakness. Perhaps nobody would have even noticed Tchekóunoff's sudden zeal if the poor irritable sick man had not drawn the attention of the other patients to us. Anyhow, they remained silent during the altercation between the two, and a few even assumed a haughty air, as if they considered this quarrel beneath their notice. They all seemed very much interested in something which was going to happen, and I understood from their conversation that they were expecting the arrival of a convict who was at that very moment running the gauntlet. Some said that he might consider himself rather fortunate to be let off so easily, as he had only been sentenced to five hundred strokes.

By this time I had settled myself sufficiently in the ward to see that there were two classes of patients in it—those who were really ill, and those who were well, but had come in to rest. By far the majority

of the sick people seemed to be afflicted with scurvy and eye disease, both of which affections are endemic in that part of the world, and of the rest a few were ill with fever; there were two or three cases of consumption, and some were merely indisposed. No care had been taken to separate the infectious or contagious diseases from the rest; the patients were huddled together indiscriminately, and even syphilitic affections were not excluded. The doctors never refused admittance to the poor fellows who asked to come in for a time to rest, especially if there happened to be many empty beds. The convicts are so badly kept in the prison that the hospital, bad as it was, seemed to them a perfect Paradise, in spite of the mephitic air and the locked wards which nobody was ever allowed to leave. Some men would gladly have spent their whole life lying in bed, if only the doctor had let them. I examined my new comrades, not without interest. On the other side of the room, in the bed next but one to Oustiánzeff, lay a convict called Mikhaïloff, whom I had seen in the prison only a fortnight ago. He had been ill for some time, and ought to have been in the hospital long ago; but he struggled with his disease with a kind of stubborn patience till his strength forsook him altogether. He was taken to the hospital soon after the Christmas holidays, and died there of galloping consumption. I was struck by the terrible change which sickness had wrought in his face, which I remembered as one of the first that I had noticed in the prison. His neighbour was an old soldier from the reformatory battalion, who was fearfully dirty in his habits.

But I am not going to speak here of every patient in the ward individually. If I have mentioned this old gentleman at all it is only because of the impression he produced on me. He was suffering from a bad cold at that time, and sneezed incessantly day and night, even in his sleep. At the moment I am speaking of, he was sitting on his bed, holding a small brown paper parcel with snuff in one hand, which he kept stuffing into his nose, to produce more violent sneezing. After sneezing into his pocket-handkerchief he wiped it on his buff-coloured dressing-gown. This he did all the week. Not one of the other patients seemed to think it worth his while to protest against his putting his dressing-gown to such use, although they knew that it might be their lot any time to wear the same garment. But then our common people are not very particular about such trifles. I felt quite sick at the sight, and involuntarily examined my dressing-gown with a mixture of loathing and curiosity. It had for some time past been attracting my attention by its curious smell, which reminded me of drugs, plasters, pus, and still more unpleasant things, which is not to be wondered at, seeing that it had been worn by sick people from time immemorial. The lining may perhaps have been washed once, but I am not too sure of that. At the present moment it bore very visible traces of having come into contact with various fluids and salves, blood, etc. It often happened that convicts who had been flogged were taken to the hospital immediately after the execution, and had wet bandages applied to their bleeding and bruised backs. The dressing-

gown was flung over the wet shirt, and got stained naturally enough. I was a frequent inmate of the hospital during the many years that I spent in the convict prison, but whenever I had to put on a dressing-gown I did so with fear and trembling. Among the objects of my aversion were the large and remarkably fat lice who inhabited the said garments. Killing a louse was an unfailing source of delight and amusement to the convicts, and whenever the creature expired under the coarse clumsy nail of some convict a broad grin of satisfaction illuminated the sportsman's face. Bugs were also held in great abomination, and many a long winter evening, which would otherwise have been exceedingly dull, was enlivened by an animated chase after those insects. So far as external appearances went nothing could be cleaner than our wards, with the exception of the bad smell; but the internal arrangements left much to be desired. True, the patients were accustomed to dirt, and even looked upon it as one of the necessaries of life; and the hospital arrangements did not do much towards developing or fostering a sense of cleanliness. More of this hereafter.

Hardly had Tchekóunoff given me my tea (it had been prepared with water which had stood in our ward for the last twenty-four hours, as the pail was only filled once a day) when the door was thrown open, and the soldier who had just been flogged entered with a double escort. This was the first time I had ever seen a flogged man, though later on I used frequently to see them brought in, or even carried in if the punishment had been too severe. The arrival

of such a poor wretch was always hailed by the patients as a pleasant change in their monotonous lives. Yet, as it would have been contrary to prison etiquette to show too much interest in them, they were generally received with ultra-severe faces and exaggerated gravity, except when the new-comer was a noted criminal who had been severely flogged, when he was treated with great respect and consideration. This time, however, the young culprit happened to be a poor young recruit who had deserted his regiment; he was received in silence. To their praise be it said here, that the men never worried their suffering comrade either by useless expressions of pity or regret, or by bitter or sarcastic remarks, but quietly applied themselves to nurse and tend him, especially if he happened to be too weak to do anything for himself. The feldsheers never troubled themselves much about such a patient, knowing from experience that he would be well taken care of in the ward. The treatment consisted in laying a shirt or a sheet which had been dipped in cold water, and well wrung out, on the torn and wounded back, and extracting the splinters of wood which frequently remain in the flesh from the sticks which have been broken on it. This latter operation is said to be exceedingly painful, but I have never seen a patient flinch under it, or even utter a groan. Only their faces would turn deadly pale, and a curious glitter came into their eyes as they glanced restlessly from one to the other with trembling lips, which they tried in vain to keep still by biting them. The new-comer was a tall, good-looking lad, who might have been twenty-three

years old. His back was much bruised and swollen; he was stripped to the waist, and a wet sheet had been flung over his shoulders. He shivered as if he were bitterly cold as he walked up and down in the ward for nearly an hour and a half. I happened to glance at his face as he passed by me; there was a wild vacant look in his eyes, which wandered restlessly about the room and seemed unable to rest on anything. I imagined that he glanced wistfully at my tea, which was smoking in the cup, while his teeth were chattering in his head with cold, so I asked him if he would like some. He turned round sharply, and without saying a word took the proffered cup, and swallowed the hot tea without sugar. Then he set down the cup, and, without thanking me, left the table, and again took up his restless wanderings backwards and forwards through the ward. The other convicts left him to himself after rendering him the necessary services, and took no further notice of him, to his evident satisfaction. It had grown dark meanwhile; a small night-light was lighted in the ward, two or three convicts produced their own candles and candlesticks, the doctor paid his evening visit, the sergeant-at-arms on duty called the roll, a large wooden pail was brought in, and the doors locked for the night. During the daytime the convicts were allowed to leave the ward for a minute or so, but under no circumstance whatever during the night.

A hospital in a convict prison is a very different institution from a common hospital, and a sick convict must bear his punishment even during his illness. I do not know to whom we were indebted

for this preposterous arrangement, as well as for many others of which I shall speak more hereafter. Not to the doctors, for they were good and kind to us and had a friendly word for every one, and a poor prisoner who is cast off and scorned by all the world is very grateful for their kindness. As we were not allowed to leave the ward for more than a minute at a time it is clear that out-door exercise, or at least a walk in the galleries and passages, was quite out of the question. Yet the patients in the other wards, who were not convicts, were free to take as much exercise as was good for them in the passages, and to breathe an air which, if not irreproachably pure, was at least less impregnated with mephitic exhalations than the air in our ward, which was hardly ever renewed day or night. I shudder now when I think of the condition of the atmosphere at night in the hot, ill-ventilated room whither we came in search of health. I have often wondered if our superiors really believed that a convict prisoner who applies to the doctor for leave to go to the hospital merely shams sickness and deceives the doctor in order to profit by a moment's solitude when he goes to the retreat in the night, and make his escape. Where is he to go to? And how? In what garb? If the convict is allowed to leave the ward at all during the day-time, surely the same permission might be granted him during the night. The door is always guarded by two sentinels, one of whom has a loaded gun; the retreat is only two steps from the door, nevertheless the convict is accompanied there by the second sentinel, who watches him all the time he is there.

There is a double window in the closet with an iron grating before it, and in the court-yard below another sentinel walks up and down all the night. In order to get out of the window it would be necessary first to smash both the panes and break the grating. Would the sentinel look on and let the prisoner do it? But, supposing he kills the sentinel before the latter has time to give the alarm, he would still have to break the windows and the grating, which he could hardly do without attracting the attention of the warders who sleep at a short distance from the sentinel. And about ten steps further on two more sentinels mount guard at the door of the second convict ward, and more warders sleep near them. And where is a man to run to in the midst of winter in stockings and slippers, a dressing-gown and night-cap? And if I am right in my surmise as to there being so little danger of a convict's escaping—there is none at all in reality—why should the last days and hours of sick people, who stand in greater need of fresh air than people who are well, be rendered so hard by needless cruelty?

While I am dwelling on abuses let me mention here another which has frequently roused my indignation. I am speaking of the chains which a sick convict is forced to wear until the last moment of his life. How is it that nobody, not even the doctors, have ever been struck by the cruelty of this proceeding, and used their influence with the Governors to allow a dying man to die without his chains? It may be objected here that after all the chains are not a great weight, as they hardly weigh more than eight

or twelve pounds. A healthy person can easily carry ten pounds without inconvenience, although I have been repeatedly assured that wearing chains for several years causes wasting of the limbs. But what must be the sufferings of a person dying of consumption—who is so weak that a straw seems a burden—to have that weight constantly attached to him and dragging him down. While I am writing these lines there rises in my memory the remembrance of poor Mikhaïloff's death-bed, who died a few days after I came. I had known him very little during his lifetime. He was a spare, tall, fine-looking lad, not above twenty-five years old, very silent, and with a look of intense sadness in his face, which made the convicts say that he 'faded away' in the prison. He was in the Special Department, and much liked by his fellow-prisoners. All I remember of his face are his beautiful dark eyes. He died on a clear, frosty day at 3 P.M. The sunshine was streaming in through the frozen green window-panes, and illuminating the pale face of the sufferer. Poor fellow, he passed away after a long and painful struggle. It was evident in the morning that he no longer recognised us. The others tried to help him as well as they could, as he seemed to be in great pain, breathing with difficulty and gasping for air. He had thrown off one by one his bedclothes and his dressing-gown, and was pulling and tugging at his shirt, as if its weight were too much for him. They helped him to take it off. I could not help shuddering as I gazed upon that long thin body, with its skeleton arms and legs, sunken abdomen, and protruding ribs. He was per-

fectly naked, a wooden cross with a small silk bag attached to it was suspended round his neck, and the iron rings still hung loosely round his emaciated legs. The men were unusually quiet during the last half-hour of his life; they talked to each other below their breath, and moved noiselessly about the room. Nobody seemed inclined to talk much. Occasionally some one would make an indifferent remark or cast a glance at the dying man, in whose throat the ominous rattling had already begun. Suddenly raising his trembling hand, he seized the amulet, and began to pull at it as if he felt oppressed by the tiny silk bag. Some one took it off for him, and he expired ten minutes later. One of the men knocked at the door and told the sentinel what had happened. The warder came in, and, after gazing stolidly at the corpse, went to call the feldsheer. The latter, a good-natured young fellow, who was perhaps a little too vain of his personal appearance (which was by no means unprepossessing), appeared soon after, walked quickly towards the bed, and with a look of profound professional wisdom felt the dead man's pulse, waved his hand, and left the room to report the case to the officer on duty, as the prisoner had been in the Special Department, and certain ceremonies had to be fulfilled before his death could be officially recognised. While we were waiting for the officer, one of the men remarked in a low tone that perhaps the dead man's eyes had better be closed, whereupon another went quietly up to the corpse and closed its eyes. The little wooden cross was lying on the pillow; he took it up, looked at it, hung it again on Mik-

bailoff's neck, and crossed himself. Meanwhile the dead face had become rigid. A ray of sunshine played on it; the mouth was partly open, showing two rows of white teeth which were hardly covered by the thin lips. At last the sergeant-at-arms on duty came in, in his full uniform, followed by two warders. He approached the bed hesitatingly and casting doubtful glances at the convicts, who were watching his movements in sullen silence. When he had nearly reached the bed he stopped suddenly, as if struck by something—the naked, emaciated body with the heavy chains attached to it, as if in grim mockery, evidently produced on him a deep impression, and, moved by a sudden impulse, he took off his sword and helmet, and crossed himself. He was a middle-aged man, with a stern, grey, weather-beaten face. Tchekóunoff, also a grey-haired old man, happened to be standing near him at that moment. He had been watching every one of his movements, looking fixedly into his face. Suddenly their eyes met, and Tchekóunoff's under-lip began to quiver. He made a queer grimace, showed his teeth, and said hurriedly to the sergeant, moving his head in the direction of the corpse, 'He had a mother once!' and walked away.

I felt as if these simple words had stabbed me to the heart. What made him say them, and how had they come into his head? By this time the warders had taken up the corpse, the straw rustled under their hands, and suddenly, in the midst of the general silence, the chains fell off. One of the warders picked them up, and the body was carried out. Everybody began to talk at once.

But I have strayed from my subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOSPITAL (*continued*).

It was the custom for the doctors to pay their visits early in the morning. About 11 A.M. the head physician, escorted by his staff, made his appearance, the first medical visit having been paid us an hour and a half ago by his assistant. The latter was a clever, kind-hearted young man. The convicts liked him, and used to say that he had but one fault—viz., he was too meek. He was not much given to talking, at any rate, and gave me the impression of feeling ill at ease in our presence. He was always ready to alter a patient's diet if the latter did not like his food and begged for a change, and I think he would even have changed our medicines if we had asked him.

When he paid his visits he always stopped before each bed, examined the patient and listened to his complaints with great attention, then prescribed for him, and gave him the necessary directions about his food. He could not help seeing sometimes that the patient was quite well, and had nothing in the world the matter with him, but as the poor fellow had come to the hospital to rest from his hard work,

or to sleep on a mattress instead of bare boards, and in a warm room instead of a damp cell where crowds of pale, squalid wretches were huddled together awaiting their trial, he calmly put him down as a *febris catarrhalis*, and even let him stay in bed for a week. This *febris catarrhalis* was a constant joke among us. The convicts knew that this formula had been adopted by doctors and patients by a kind of tacit understanding to designate shamming illness, and they freely translated it by 'reserve pain.' It happened occasionally that a patient would abuse the doctor's kindness, and remain in bed till he had to be summarily dismissed. Those were hard times for our assistant, who could never make up his mind to tell the man that he must get well and leave the hospital. He generally began by dropping sundry hints that he—i.e. the patient—seemed pretty well now; that the ward was getting crowded, and so on, instead of writing 'sanatus est' on his ticket and dismissing him without further ceremony. The head physician was also a kind-hearted, honest man, but much more energetic in his ways than his assistant. He was also universally liked and respected. As I have said above, he was always accompanied by his staff on his rounds. He always examined each patient separately, stopping longer with those who were seriously ill, and never leaving them without saying a kind word. I have never known him turn away a patient who was suffering from 'reserve pain;' but if the man obstinately refused to get better after a certain length of time, he dismissed him without much ado, saying in a quiet decided tone, 'Well,

brother, I suppose you have been here long enough, and got fairly rested. It is time for you to go now.'

The most obstinate patients were generally either those who had a strong objection to work, especially in the summer time, or prisoners who had been sentenced to severe corporal punishment. I remember a case where the man could only be induced to leave by a most severe, not to say cruel, treatment. He had come in with some disease of the eyes; they were red and inflamed, and he complained of a violent, burning pain in them. He was blistered, dry-cupped, had his eyes syringed daily with some sharp liquid, etc., but without any effect. At last the doctors guessed that he was deceiving them—this constant inflammation, which grew neither better nor worse, was a suspicious symptom. The other patients had known it all along, although he had never told them. He was a handsome young fellow, but there was a sinister, suspicious expression in his face which repelled us. He made friends with no one, but watched us suspiciously from under his half-closed eyelids as if he suspected everybody of evil intentions towards him. He had served in the army, been concerned in some robbery, which was discovered, and he had been sentenced to one thousand strokes, and I do not remember now how many years of penal servitude.

I have said in the first part of my book that a convict prisoner will sometimes do a desperate thing to escape punishment for the time-being—stab a fellow-prisoner or an officer on the night before the execution. He is again brought up for trial, and it

makes no difference to him that he will still be flogged two months hence, and that his punishment will be more severe than it would have been now. He has gained his end in putting off the dreaded moment for a few days or weeks at the utmost, and that is all he wanted. So little moral strength do these unfortunates possess! The convicts began to whisper among themselves that we ought to be on our guard, as he might take it into his head any time to murder one of us. But in spite of these dire forebodings, nobody thought of taking the least precaution, not even those whose beds were next to his, and who were consequently in danger of becoming his victims in an evil hour. He had been seen at night to rub his eyes with whitewash which he took from the wall, and something else, to make them look red and inflamed in the morning. At last the head physician lost all patience, and threatened to try a seton. But still the poor wretch could not make up his mind to get better, whether from obstinacy or pusillanimity I know not, for, although a seton is easier to bear than one thousand strokes with a stick, it is bad enough. The mode of application is as follows:—A large piece of skin on the back of the patient's neck is gathered together with one hand, and a knife is stuck through it. A piece of broad linen tape is then drawn through the wound. Every day at a certain hour the tape is pulled backward and forward to keep the sore open. The unfortunate sufferer bore this torture heroically for several days, and when at last he could bear it no longer, his eyes got suddenly well, and he asked to leave the hospital.

As soon as the sore on his neck was healed he left us, and was flogged the next day.

I may be wrong in calling the convicts pusillanimous and cowardly after all, for the last moments before the punishment must be terrible. Still, I have known men leave the hospital long before their back was well to undergo the rest of their punishment and have done with it altogether, for the life of a prisoner committed for trial is a hundred times worse than that of a convict prisoner. I have often noticed that men who have been much beaten in their lives seem to mind corporal punishment less than others. Their backs grow hard, and they themselves indifferent, and they begin to look upon flogging merely as a slight temporary discomfort. I know that this is the case from what I have been told by a convict prisoner from the Special Department, a Kalmuck by birth, who had been baptised late in life by the name of Alexander or Alexandra, as the others used to call him sometimes. This Alexander was a curious fellow, brave and shrewd, and exceedingly good-natured at the same time. He told me one day, laughing heartily, that he had been sentenced to four thousand strokes, but, suddenly becoming serious, he assured me that he could never have borne them if he had not been accustomed to blows from his earliest days, and that all the time he lived with his tribe he could not remember a time when his back had not been scarred and bruised. He seemed to be profoundly grateful for the kind of education he had received. 'They beat me for everything and anything, Alexander Petróvitch,' said he

to me one evening, as we were sitting on my bed in the gloaming, 'and that for fifteen years. Ever since I can remember I have been beaten several times a day, till I got so used to it that I did not mind it a bit.' I do not remember now how and when he enlisted, although I suppose that he may have told me this episode of his life, which had been a very roving and unsettled one. All I recollect now is his telling me how terribly frightened he felt when he was sentenced to four thousand strokes for murdering his officer. 'I knew that they were going to punish me severely, and I began to fear that this would be the end of me. I had been accustomed to be whipped every day of my life; still, four thousand strokes is no trifle, and the worst of it was that the officers had taken a dislike to me. Well, it struck me that perhaps if I became a Christian they might let me off more easily. My friends told me that my being a Christian or a heathen would make no difference; but still I thought that it would do no harm to try. So I was baptised and named Alexander, but my friends had been right after all, and not a word was said about my being pardoned. That was too bad, wasn't it now? Says I to myself, "Very well, you'll be sorry for that some time." And so they were, Alexander Petróvitch, for I gave them no end of trouble. You see, I can pretend to be dead—I mean not quite dead, but dying. Well, I was flogged; my back felt as if it were on fire. I screamed; but it was all in vain. When they began the second thousand I felt that it was all over with me, my head swam round, my legs gave way under me, and I

tumbled down flat. My face was purple; I foamed at the mouth, breathed no more, and pretended to be dead. The doctor came and looked at me, and said, "He is dying." They took me to the hospital, where I revived quick enough. Thus they flogged me twice, and I deceived them each time, and died after the third thousand; but when it came to the fourth thousand, they were so angry, and beat so hard, that each blow seemed to count for three. Oh, how they beat me! That cursed last thousand was worse than all the other three together, and if I had not died just before the end, when there were only two hundred strokes left, they would have killed me on the spot. But I was no such fool as to let them kill me; I knew better. I died again, and did it so well that they all thought, even the doctor, that it was all over with me this time. But when it came to the last two hundred strokes, they had their revenge. And why could they not kill me now? I'll tell you why—because I have been beaten all my life and got accustomed to it, else I would have been dead long ago. O—oh, I have been beaten all my life,' he repeated thoughtfully, as if trying to remember how many times he had been beaten. 'No, no,' added he, after a moment's silence; 'it's no use, I cannot count the times I have been beaten—I could not, even if I tried hard.' Here he glanced at me, and burst out into a good-humoured laugh. I could not help smiling. 'I'll tell you something, Alexander Petróvitch—whenever I dream at night it is always about a beating; I never dream about anything else.' I suppose that these dreams must have troubled

his slumbers considerably, as he often used to scream in his sleep, to the great indignation of his fellow-prisoners, who immediately awakened him by sundry kicks and blows, and asked him, 'What are you yelling for, you devil?' He was a healthy, square-built fellow, about forty-five years old, with a jovial disposition. He lived in peace with every one, although he was a great thief and got many a drubbing for his thievish propensities; but I do not think that there were many convicts who did not steal, or who did not get beaten for it.

Let me add one remark here. I have often wondered at the total absence of all feelings of ill-will with which these poor fellows used to talk about their punishment and those who punished them. Tales of cruelty which would make my heart throb with indignation were told by the sufferers without the slightest shade of anger or hatred; not unfrequently they would laugh like children while relating their sufferings. I remember M—— once telling me how he had been beaten. Not being of gentle birth he had been sentenced to five hundred strokes with a birch rod. Some one else had told me about it, and I asked him whether it was true, and how he had felt at the moment. He answered me curtly, like a man who is suffering from some internal pain, and without looking at me, but I could see the colour rise in his cheeks. Suddenly he looked up with an expression of wild hatred in his eyes such as I have seldom seen in a human face, while his lips trembled with indignation. I knew that he would never forget that part of his life's history.

There was a certain Lieutenant Jerebjátnikoff among our officers about whom I heard many a tale during my stay in the hospital. He was, I think, the only other officer besides the Major whom the convicts hated and disliked for his cruelty. He was a large, tall man, about thirty years old, with fat rosy cheeks, white teeth, and a coarse, loud laugh. Even the most superficial observer would have been struck by the thoughtless, vacant expression of his face. This Lieutenant Jerebjátnikoff had a passion for whipping and flogging, and nothing afforded him greater delight than to superintend an execution. He looked upon punishing as an art, which he cultivated for its own sake, trying to invent all kinds of variations and new modes of punishment. I shall merely give one instance out of a thousand which have been told me, to convey to the reader a faint idea of the cruelty which is sometimes practised in a convict prison. A prisoner is led out to run the gauntlet. Jerebjátnikoff has been appointed to superintend the execution. One glance at the long row of men armed with thick sticks suffices to kindle the fire of enthusiasm in his breast. He walks down the ranks, exhorting the soldiers with a significant look to be sure and do their duty, else——. The poor fellows know too well the meaning of those words. The culprit appears on the scene of action, and if by chance he happens to be unacquainted with Jerebjátnikoff's ways the latter is sure to play him some trick. It is the custom for a convict—while he is stripped and has his hands tied to the butt-ends of guns preparatory to being dragged along the

'green street' by two corporals, who take hold of the barrels of the guns, and advance slowly, pulling the shrieking, shrinking, half-naked wretch after them—to implore the officer who superintends the execution to have mercy on him and not punish him too severely. 'Most high-born one! have pity on me, do not let them beat me too hard. Be a father to me, and I shall pray God for you every day of my life! do not kill me; have mercy on me!' and so on. That was all that Jerebjátnikoff wanted; he immediately made a sign to the corporals to cease their preparations, and the following conversation took place:—

'My dear friend, what can I do for you? You know very well that I must obey the law.'

'Most high-born one! it is all in your hands—be merciful!'

'Do you think that I do not feel sorry for you? It is not pleasant for me to stand by and see them beat you. I am not a bad man, you know. Or maybe you think I am

'Most high-born one, we know that you are our father, and we your children! Be a father to me!' cries the convict, beginning to feel hopeful about his future.

'Look here, my friend; I know that you have enough good sense to understand that it is not I who punishes you. Humanity commands that I should be merciful to you, you poor sinner!'

'You are pleased to speak the truth, most high-born one!'

'Yes, I ought to be merciful to you, even if you

were the greatest sinner on the face of the earth. But what can I do against the law? I must serve God and my country; and it would be wrong in me to disobey the laws.'

'Most high-born one!'

'Well, I will be merciful to you for once. I know that I am sinning against the law, but I shall do it just this one time, and not be too hard upon you. Stop a moment. Suppose I harm you by my kindness, instead of helping you to become a better man? For aught I know you may take it into your head to think that you'll be let off as easily every time, and go and do something worse; and then I shall have to answer for it all.'

'Most high-born one! I will try and keep my friends and foes from sinning! I swear before the throne of the Creator——'

'Well, well. Promise me that you will sin no more.'

'May the Lord Almighty strike me down dead; and may I, when I go to that other world——'

'Hush, do not swear. Your word is quite sufficient. Will you promise me?'

'Most high-born one!'

'I forgive you for the sake of your tears, and because you are an orphan, are you not?'

'I am, most high-born one! I am quite alone in this world—my father and mother are both dead!'

'I forgive you because you are an orphan; but, mind, it is for the last time. Take him away,' adds he, in such a kind voice that the convict does

not know how to thank God for such a kind-hearted officer. The drum sounds; the terrible procession starts at last; the first soldiers lift their sticks.

'Beat him!' shouts Jerebjátnikoff, at the top of his voice. 'Flog him; strike him harder, harder, harder! Faster, faster! Flog the orphan; flog the scoundrel! Go at it; go at it! More, more, more! Faster, faster!' The blows rain down on the unfortunate wretch; he shrieks and staggers with the pain, while Jerebjátnikoff runs down the line behind him, holding his sides and nearly bent double with laughing. The tears run down his face, and you almost feel sorry for him, poor fellow! He is delighted with his trick; and when he can stop laughing for a few seconds, he roars again: 'Flog him; beat him soundly! Flog the orphan; beat the scoundrel!'

Occasionally he would vary his mode of action. The convict begins as usual to plead for mercy. Jerebjátnikoff listens gravely to him, and says at last:

'Look here, my friend, I shall punish you severely, for you deserve it. But I will not let them tie you to the butt-ends of their guns. Run down the line as fast as you can, and you will get through it in a shorter time. What do you think? Would you like to try?'

The convict hesitates a moment. He does not quite like this novel method of being punished; but he says to himself, 'After all he may be right. I shall run down the line as fast as I can, and get through the whole thing in a much shorter time, and perhaps even escape a few blows.'

'I think I will try it, most high-born one.'

'Very well. Off with you!' 'Look sharp!' shouts he to the soldiers, knowing very well that the victim will not escape a single blow; for woe betide the soldier who misses his aim. The convict starts at full speed, hoping to reach the end of the 'green street' before the soldiers have well lifted their sticks, but suddenly falls shrieking to the ground—all the sticks seem to fall on his back at once. 'No, most high-born one; I had rather be punished according to the law,' says he, rising slowly to his feet, and looking pale and scared; while Jerebjátnikoff, who has been looking forward eagerly to this finale, shrieks with laughter. But it would take too long to repeat all the stories which circulated about him in the prison.

Similar stories, only perhaps of a less revolting character, were related about a certain Lieutenant Smekáloff, who had been Governor of our prison before the time of our Major. If the convicts spoke about Jerebjátnikoff in an indifferent tone, without manifesting either much hatred or much admiration for his deeds, and even with a certain air of scorn, they remembered the reign of Smekáloff with unfeigned delight. The difference between these two men consisted merely in the different view which they each took of flogging. Jerebjátnikoff revelled in the sensual pleasure which it gave him, while Smekáloff, though by no means an adversary of corporal punishment, did not care particularly whether a man was flogged or not. But he possessed to such a degree the art of ingratiating himself with the convicts that they looked back with deep regret to the bygone days when

he whipped them. 'He was like a father to us!' they used to say with a sigh, comparing him with the actual Governor. 'What a kind soul he was!'

Smekáloff was a simple-minded, unpretending creature, good-natured enough in his way, who had tact enough to know where to draw the line in his behaviour towards the convicts, so as to make them feel that, while in some respects he was their equal, he still remained their superior in others. Those who possess this peculiar art of making themselves liked by their inferiors are not always conscious of it. I think that the secret of it lies in the familiar way in which they treat them; there is nothing about themselves that reminds one of a well-bred, dainty gentleman—on the contrary, there is a flavour of vulgarity about them, which attracts the lower classes, who will gladly exchange the best and kindest person in the world for the most wicked and cruel one if he only happens to be their equal in morality; and if this latter individual should be really good-natured in his own way they will even worship him. Only a very few of Lieutenant Smekáloff's tricks had been handed down to posterity, perhaps because there were so few of them, as the good Lieutenant sorely lacked the creative faculty. One of these will suffice. A convict is going to be whipped. Smekáloff appears on the scene, smiling and joking; he at once enters into a lively conversation with the man, asks him all kinds of questions about his parents, his private affairs, his life in the prison, etc.; not with any peculiar purpose, but simply because he likes to know all about him. The rods are brought, and a chair for Smeká-

loff, who sits down and lights his pipe. He always smoked a long pipe. The convict begins his usual invocations for mercy, which Smekáloff cuts short by a peremptory, 'No, no, brother; stop that and lie down!' The culprit obeys with a sigh. 'Do you know such a prayer?' asks Smekáloff. 'To be sure, most high-born one! I am not a heathen, and was taught to pray when I was a boy.' 'Let's hear it, then.' The convict has got his cue; he knows from experience what prayer to repeat and how it will all end, for has not the same thing been done perhaps thirty or forty times before. Smekáloff knows that the convict knows it all, and that the soldiers who stand with lifted rods beside their victim have witnessed the performance many and many a time, but he will repeat it because it is his own invention, and he is not a little proud of his poetical talent. The convict begins to pray, the soldiers stand by waiting, while Smekáloff has half risen from his chair, and with lifted hand watches for the cue. The culprit repeats the first lines of a well-known prayer, and, when he comes to the words 'in heaven,' 'Stop!' shouts Smekáloff, and, turning to the soldier who stands there with his rod lifted, he adds, 'Give him one, two, three, four, five, six, seven!' and roaring with laughter sinks back into his chair. The soldiers grin, and the sufferer all but smiles too, although he has heard the well-known word of command, and knows that in the next moment the rod will fall on his bare back. Smekáloff is enraptured with his poetical talent, for he has composed the line and thought of the rhyme, and goes home after

the execution in high spirits. So is the culprit, and half an hour afterwards you may hear him telling his comrades about the thirty-first repetition of a trick which has been played thirty times before. 'What a good fellow he is! and so jolly too!' And the memory of their good Lieutenant would awaken in their hearts a longing for those bygone times when he flogged them.

'How well I remember him now,' some veteran would say, grinning at the remembrance, 'sitting by the window in his dressing-gown, drinking tea and smoking his pipe. I take off my cap. "Where are you going to, Aksenoff?" "To work, Mikhaïl Vassilyevitch;" and he would smile. What a good man he was!'

'Aye, aye, we shall never have another like him,' remarks one of the listeners.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOSPITAL (*continued*).[1]

THE reason why I have not touched before on the subject of punishments and the executors of these interesting duties is simply this—I knew very little about it before I came to stay in the hospital, and the little I knew was only from hearsay.

It was the custom to send all the military prisoners, both from the town and the whole district, who had been sentenced to severe corporal punishment to our two wards, and it seems natural that at that early epoch of my captivity, when the novelty of my surroundings had not yet worn off, the aspect of all those unfortunate wretches who were either awaiting their punishment, or who had just suffered it, should produce upon me a terrible impression. I well remember the eagerness with which I listened to the other convicts whenever the conversation turned on the subject of punishments, asking them questions, and trying to solve the many problems which seemed to be springing up on every side. I wanted especially to know the different grades of

[1] I have heard since that a great many alterations have taken place in the discipline of convict prisons.—*Author's remark.*

punishment, the manner in which the sentence was carried out, what the convicts thought about it all; and I tried to picture to myself the moral condition of those who were going to be flogged. I have already remarked elsewhere that few men look forward to their punishment calmly—not even those who have been repeatedly flogged before. It seems as if, at such times, an involuntary and invincible sensation of physical terror took possession of the whole being of the delinquent and paralysed all his faculties.

In after years, when I had grown accustomed to many things, I still liked to watch those criminals who, not having been able to bear the number of strokes to which they had been sentenced at once, had been sent to the hospital, to stay there till their backs were healed, when they left it to undergo the rest of their sentence. It is the duty of the prison doctor to be present at every execution, and to stop it if there is reason to fear that the patient might die under the blows. As a rule, a man can bear five hundred, one thousand, or even one thousand five hundred, strokes, without any serious injury; but if he is sentenced to two or even three thousand strokes or more, the sentence is divided into two or three parts of a thousand strokes each. Both on the day previous to their leaving the hospital, as well as on the ominous day itself, these unfortunates were sullen, morose, disinclined to talk. They wandered about the ward with an absent look in their eyes. Their room-fellows generally took no notice whatever of them, but left them entirely to themselves, without even trying to offer a word of consolation; and in doing so they showed tact and good sense. There

are, of course, exceptions to this as to everything else, as, for instance, the robber Orloff, whom I mentioned in the fourth chapter of this volume. The reader will remember how anxious he was to get well so as to be able to undergo the rest of his sentence, start for Nertchinsk, and escape on the road. But then he was a man of a remarkably passionate nature, who thirsted for life; and at the same time he was overjoyed to find himself still alive after receiving one-half of the strokes he had been sentenced to. It seems that while he was in prison awaiting his trial, various rumours had reached him to the effect that this time he would be punished according to the utmost rigour of the law, and he had fully expected to die under the blows. But when, after all, he did survive the first part of his punishment he became more hopeful. True, he was more dead than alive when he was taken to the hospital, his back was in a fearful condition, but he wanted to live, he thirsted for life—they had not killed him after all, and there was no reason to believe that the rumours were true; and he might be free once more, and roam about in the woods and fields if he succeeded in escaping on the road. Two days after he left the hospital he came back to it to die in the same bed he had occupied during his previous stay there.

And yet the same men who dreaded the very thought of punishment bore their sufferings heroically. I seldom heard them groan or complain of pain, not even on the first night after the flogging; but then our common people are used to pain, and know how to bear it.

By the way, I remember asking repeatedly what the pain was like, and whether it was really as bad as was generally assumed. I do not think that I asked such questions from idle curiosity, though I really do not know now what made me ask them at the time. But I never got any satisfactory answer—all they could tell me about it was that the pain was of a burning character. I once put the same question to M—— when we had become more intimate. 'The pain is intense,' said he, 'and I felt at the same time as if my back were being roasted over a large fire.'

The convicts unanimously assured me that they preferred flogging to whipping, as the latter is the more painful operation of the two. Four or five hundred strokes with a birch rod are almost sure to kill a man, and a thousand strokes will kill even the strongest man; while the same number of strokes with a cane will hardly injure a man of medium constitution. I suppose that whipping has a more irritating effect on the nerves than flogging, and for that reason gives more pain.

The convict prisoners and criminals in general are whipped by the executioner. There are two classes of executioners—free men who do it for a living, and convicts who are first apprenticed to another executioner for a certain time, till they have learnt his art, when they are sent to some prison, where they remain for life. The first class of executioners is naturally of a much lower moral standard than the latter, and yet the former are much more respected, and even liked, than the latter, who are

universally despised and feared by the common people. I have often wondered why one executioner should be the object of a superstitious fear, while the other is treated like any ordinary mortal. I have heard many curious stories about these men, and known them do strange and apparently cruel things. Thus, I have seen executioners who were by no means cruel or ill-natured men fly into a rage because their victim would not scream and ask for mercy, thereby infringing an ancient custom, which demands that every culprit who is being whipped should scream as loud as he can, and ask for mercy. I remember that one of them whom I knew personally, and who was considered even a good-natured man, grew so angry at his victim's stubbornness, that he actually gave him fifty strokes or so over and above his due. He had at first intended to be very merciful to him, but not hearing the usual piteous cries of 'Most high-born one! be a father to me! Have mercy on me, and I shall pray God for you all the rest of my life!' he went on beating till he gained his end, and made his victim scream. 'I cannot abide impudence,' said he to me when I remonstrated with him about his cruelty. The convict executioner lives in the prison in a room by himself, and lives very well too, but is never allowed to go out without an escort. He is an artist in his way, and likes to show off. It is not impossible that his peculiar position may tend to foster and develop in him any latent tendency to brutality; but it seems also to develop in him a feeling of pride. Nearly all the executioners that I have met were

clever, thoughtful men, very ambitious, and excessively proud.

I had the chance once of observing an executioner for some length of time. He was a man of medium size—about forty, I should think—with a muscular, sinewy body, a pleasant, clever face, and curly hair. He was always scrupulously clean and neat in his dress, and remarkably calm and dignified in his behaviour. When spoken to he would answer briefly and with an air of patronising kindness, as if he were doing me a favour. The officers would occasionally enter into conversation with him, and, curiously enough, they never treated him with the same familiarity with which they spoke to other convicts. It was amusing to me to watch him grow more dignified, polite, and reserved in his manner towards them the more kindly they spoke to him. At such times it was clearly written in his face that he considered himself far superior to his officer.

On hot summer days he used sometimes to be sent with an escort, and armed with a thin, long pole to destroy the dogs in the town. There were a great many stray dogs in the place, who increased with remarkable rapidity and became positively dangerous in the hot weather. It was really worth while to mark the dignified way in which he marched about the streets followed by his weary escort, frightening the women and children, and scanning the passers-by with an air of quiet contempt.

It is the custom for a civil criminal who has been sentenced to corporal punishment to bribe the executioner previous to the execution. If the culprit

happens to be rich, the former demands a certain sum, thirty or more roubles, according to the means of the latter; sometimes he will name a most exorbitant sum. He dares not punish his victim too leniently, as in such a case he would have to pay for his indulgence with his own back; but he promises him that he will not beat him too severely if he is paid a certain sum. The victim, as a rule, gladly accepts the conditions, knowing that if he should demur he will be beaten half-dead. But it sometimes happens that the executioner demands a very high sum of a very poor delinquent, who has not the means of satisfying his covetousness. In such cases the friends and relatives of the criminal almost go down on their knees before the executioner, imploring him to take less, and trying to soften his heart, but generally in vain, and woe betide the victim if his torturer has not been satisfied. Of course, in such cases the power of the executioner is greatly overrated by the terrified victim and his friends. It is universally believed, and the convicts repeatedly assured me, that he is able to kill his victim at the first stroke. I cannot vouch for the truth of this assertion, never having had the occasion of verifying it; but the executioner himself told me that it was true. Another of the current stories about him is that he can strike an apparently heavy blow without inflicting the least pain or leaving the slightest trace on his victim's back.

It is the custom among executioners, even when they have been bribed into punishing the victim less severely, to strike the first blow with all their strength,

while the others are less sharp. The first stroke is theirs, *par excellence*, and they have a right to do with it as they please. I do not know whether this is done with a view to accustom the victim at once to the pain, so as to make the succeeding blows seem less sharp, or whether the executioner wants to impress the criminal with a sense of his superior power and strength—to show off, in short. The executioner is always much excited before he goes to the execution; he knows that in such a moment he, the outcast, is lord and master. He acts a part before the assembled crowd, who look on in breathless admiration; and it is not without a feeling of pleasure, or rather satisfaction, that he shouts the traditional words to his victim, 'Look out! I'm going to burn you!'

I heard these tales, and many more of the same kind, during my first stay in the hospital. Never in all my life have I suffered more from *ennui* than in those days when I lay in my bed in the ward.

True, in the morning there was the doctor's visit to look forward to, and then the dinner, which was always the most important event of the day. The dietary was varied according to the patient's condition. Some only had soup or gruel given them, and others semola pudding, which was a favourite dish among the convicts, who were apt to become exceedingly dainty and fastidious in their food. The convalescents had a piece of boiled beef—'ox,' as it was called—for their dinner, but we all preferred the diet which was prescribed in cases of scurvy, and which consisted of a piece of beef, with onions, horse-

radish, and greens, and occasionally a glass of brandy. The bread was good, and we had either brown or white given us, according to the condition of our stomachs. All these precautions were a source of infinite amusement to the convicts, who were inclined to look upon them as mere pedantic formalism, and ate what they liked. Dinners were continually bought and sold; some, who were forbidden to eat anything but soup and pudding, bought beef kvas and hospital beer of those who had been put on a more nourishing diet. There are some large eaters who would even buy two dinners. A meat dinner was rather an expensive luxury, as it cost five copecks. If nobody could be prevailed upon to sell his dinner in our ward, the warder was despatched into the other ward to see if perchance the patients were more obliging there, or even into the military wards. The vendors had dry bread for their dinner on such days, but were perfectly satisfied with their bargain. The convicts were all more or less very poor; but those who happened to be a little better off than the rest frequently bought kalatchi, or even goodies and sweets. Our warders were very good about going into the town and buying anything we wanted without expecting any remuneration.

Dinner over, there was the long, dull afternoon before us. How endless it seemed! Some tried to kill the time by sleeping, others chatted together, or quarrelled, or told stories. The arrival of a fresh patient was hailed as a most welcome diversion, especially if he happened to be a stranger. He was scanned from head to foot, and asked where he came

from, what he had been doing there, etc. If the newcomer had been sent to us from some other convict prison, he was sure to become an object of great interest, as he might have something to relate about his journey, his companions, the road, and the place of his final destination. They seldom spoke of their own affairs, and nobody asked them any questions on that subject. Sometimes the men would compare notes about their journeys, officers, and so forth, and the conversation would become quite animated. Military criminals who had been flogged also generally made their appearance towards night, but they did not come every day; and somehow or other we always seemed to feel the tedium of the afternoon more on such days, when no criminals had been brought in. Another source of amusement were the lunatics, who were not unfrequently taken to the hospital till it could be decided whether their minds were really affected, or whether they were only simulating madness. Prisoners who are under trial will sometimes resort to this last expediency to save themselves from punishment; but they seldom have patience enough to carry on their simulation for more than two or three days, when the raving madman would at once become quiet and docile, and ask suddenly to be discharged. Neither the doctors nor the other patients ever remonstrated with them about their previous behaviour; they were allowed to depart in peace, and generally came back to us two or three days later to recover from the effects of their flogging. Real maniacs, who were sent to us on trial, were a terrible infliction. At first, when they came in shouting,

laughing, dancing, and singing, the convicts would be delighted with their contortions, and gaze at them rapturously for hours; but after a while the constant shouting and gesticulating became terribly wearisome, and before two days had passed they would have given anything to get rid of their troublesome inmate. Once—I think it must have been in my third year in the prison—we had two of these unfortunate wretches in our ward at the same time. One of them had been there for three weeks when the other arrived. His was a peculiar case. In the first year, or rather in the first spring, that I spent in the prison, I had been sent with several others to work in the brick-kilns. On the first day M—— and B—— introduced me to the overseer of the kilns, Sergeant Ostróshsky, who lived there. He was a Pole by birth; a tall, spare old man of sixty, who presented a grand and truly imposing appearance. He had served for many years in Siberia, having been there since 1830, I think, and M—— and B—— liked and even respected him, in spite of his low birth. I suppose his father had been a peasant. He spent all his spare time reading the Bible. I entered into conversation with him, and was much pleased with his kind, cheerful manner. He told us some interesting stories about himself, and looked the very picture of honesty and benevolence. I lost sight of him for two years, when some one told me casually that he had been brought up before a court-martial for something he had done, I know not what, and now he was brought into our ward a raving madman. He entered the room shrieking and laughing,

and began to dance and jump about with the most uncouth, not to say indecent, gestures. The convicts were delighted with their new inmate, but I felt inexpressibly sad. Before three days were over we did not know what to do with him. He quarrelled and fought with everybody, shrieked, yelled, sang day and night, and behaved altogether in such an indecent way that even the convicts were disgusted. He was put into a strait-jacket, but that made matters only worse. Once or twice we begged the head physician to have him removed to the other ward; but hardly had he been there two days when they begged to have him removed to his former quarters. As the other lunatic happened to be also of a quarrelsome disposition, we finally hit upon the expediency of exchanging maniacs with the other ward, so that we might each have our share of both. We all breathed more freely when they were at last removed from the hospital altogether.

I remember another curious case of lunacy. One summer day a new patient was brought into the ward, and put into the bed next to mine. He was a healthy-looking, uncouth fellow, about forty-five years old, terribly marked with small-pox, with remarkably small eyes and a sombre sullen expression. For some time he remained still on his bed, apparently lost in thought, and without speaking to any one. Suddenly, towards dusk, he turned to me, and, without any further preamble, but with an air of profound mystery, informed me that he had been sentenced to two thousand strokes, but that he was going to be pardoned because the daughter of

Colonel G—— had interceded for him. I was rather puzzled, for he had come in as an ordinary patient, not as a maniac, and replied that I did not think that the lady in question, even if she were a colonel's daughter, could have attained his pardon. I asked him what was the matter with him. He answered that he was quite well, and did not know why he had been sent to the hospital, but that the Colonel's daughter had fallen in love with him. A fortnight ago she was driving past the guardhouse, when he suddenly happened to look out of the window, upon which she fell in love with him immediately, and had already come three times under various pretexts to the guardhouse to see him. The first time she had come with her father to speak to her brother, who was on duty in the guardhouse; another time she had come with her mother to distribute alms among the prisoners, and had whispered to him that she loved him and would save him. It was strange to hear him tell this story, which had originated in his poor diseased brain. He was fully persuaded of having been pardoned, and talked in a quiet confident manner about the young lady's passionate love for him. It was singular to hear a man of his age, and with such an unprepossessing appearance, tell a romantic love story. I suppose the poor fellow may have seen some one from the window of his cell at a time when the fear of the impending punishment had already begun to work upon his brain; the thought that he might perhaps be pardoned if some one would only try and intercede for him may have flashed through his mind and started a whole train of

delusions. I listened to him in silence, and then told the other prisoners what he had been saying; but when they in their turn began to question him he refused to answer and relapsed into silence. The next day the doctor came and examined him carefully; but as there seemed to be nothing the matter with him, and he repeatedly told the doctor himself that he was quite well, he was discharged at once. Perhaps if we had known that the doctor had written 'sanat.' on his ticket we might have told him what was the matter, but we did not find it out till the doctor had left the ward and it was too late to say anything. It turned out afterwards that he had been sent to us by mistake, through some misunderstanding or other; or perhaps those who sent him to the hospital thought that he was feigning madness and wanted to ascertain if this were really so. On the second day he was flogged. We heard afterwards that he had seemed very much surprised that he should have been punished after all, and had even screamed for the police. When he came back to the hospital he was put into the other ward, as there was no room in ours. I asked how he was, and they told me that he had not spoken a word during the whole of the time which he spent there, and had seemed very much cast down and puzzled. He was sent away somewhere when his back was healed, and I lost sight of him entirely.

I noticed that the patients who were only slightly indisposed, or, at least, not seriously ill, hardly ever carried out the doctor's prescriptions, and did not take medicine; while those who were seriously ill,

on the contrary, took their mixtures and powders regularly. All external remedies and applications were in great favour with the convicts, who believed blindly in the efficacy of dry-cupping, bleeding, blistering, poulticing, etc. I was much struck with one curious fact—the very same men who only a short time before had borne the most excruciating pains without uttering a groan, writhed about and complained bitterly of the pain when they were cupped. I do not know whether they had grown all at once so sensitive to pain, or whether they were merely pretending to suffer. To tell the truth, the method of cupping as it was practised in our hospital was by no means a painless proceeding. The cupping glass had been lost or spoiled since time immemorial, so that the feldsheer was obliged to make the necessary incisions with a lancet. Cupping with a scarificator is a comparatively painless process, the instrument cuts through the skin at once; but it is no joke to have perhaps one hundred and twenty incisions made slowly with a lancet in lieu of ten cupping glasses applied at once. I speak from experience; but though the pain was bad enough, still I found that I could bear it without groaning. If a patient made too much fuss, or complained too bitterly of the pain, the others were sure to sneer at him for being so delicate, or would even occasionally give him a good scolding, which invariably had the effect of silencing him effectually. Oustyanzeff had a special dislike to such milksops, and never missed an opportunity of taking them severely to task for their effeminate ways and lack of fortitude. I suppose he could not have existed

without scolding. Sometimes he would look seriously and fixedly at us for some time without speaking, as if trying to collect his ideas or preparing a speech, and then begin to lecture us in a calm, confident voice as if he had been placed there to watch over us and look after our morals.

'He pokes his nose into everything,' the convicts would say, laughing. They were very good and for bearing, and never swore at him, but only joked good-humouredly about his passion for lecturing.

'There, now! I suppose there must be at least three cartloads of words!'

'Hold your tongue! Nobody takes off his hat to a blockhead. Why does he make such a fuss about cupping? If you have eaten the honey you must eat the gall too, and learn to bear pain.'

'It's none of your business!'

'Ay, ay, brothers!' interrupted one of the patients, 'cupping is not so bad after all; but let me tell you that there is nothing worse than having one's ears nearly wrenched off.'

The other patients burst out laughing.

'Did they pull your ears?'

'To be sure they did, and with a vengeance too!'

'That's what has made your ears stand off your head, I expect!'

The first speaker, the convict prisoner Shápkin, boasted, in fact, of remarkably long ears, which stood almost straight off from his head. He was a young man yet, and had been sent to us for vagabonding. He was a clever, quiet fellow, with a great deal of

quiet humour, which sometimes rendered his stories irresistibly comical.

'I never thought of your ears, I declare! Why should I think of your ears, you blockhead?' burst out Oustyanzeff, looking angrily at Shápkin, although the latter had not spoken to him; but Shápkin paid no attention to him.

'Who pulled you by the ears?' asked some one.

'Who else but the Isprávnik. You see, brethren, there are two of us, I and another tramp—they called him Jefím; and we were wandering about the land. Well, we got to a village called Tólmina, and rested there a short time. When we entered it, we looked round; it was a nice place enough to rest in, and besides we always preferred the country to the town. You are free to do what you like in the country, you know, but a town is a wretched shut-up place. First of all we went to the káback [1] to take a drop of something. All at once there comes up to us a ragged beggar dressed in an old dress-coat, and begins to talk to us. Says he: "May I ask you whether you have any documents?" [2] "We have not," said we. "Just so," says he, "we have none either. There are three of us here," says he, "and we all serve under General Koukoúshkine.[3] We have been spending all our tin, and not yet been able to get any more—would you be kind enough to treat us to some more liquor?"

'"With great pleasure," said we. So we sat down all together, and drank the liquor. They told us

[1] A tavern. [2] Cant for passport.
[3] I.e. in the wood where the cuckoo sings.

about a house somewhere on the outskirts of the town, where a rich tradesman lived all by himself; and we all agreed to pay him a visit that same night in a body. But unfortunately we were all caught that same night in his house, and locked up till the morning, when they took us before the Isprávnik.

'He wanted to examine us himself. We waited a while, and then he comes in with his pipe; he was a large man with whiskers, and his man brought in a cup of tea for him. He sits down in front of us. There were three other tramps besides our own party. Queer chaps, those tramps, my brothers; they never remember anything, but seem to have forgotten every blessed thing they knew in their lives. The Isprávnik turns to me. "What's your name?" roars he. So, naturally enough, I answered him like the rest: "I have forgotten it, most high-born one!"

'"Very well," says he, "I shall talk to you more by and by. I know your face," and he stares at me till I thought his eyes would drop out of his head. I had never set eyes on him in my life before. He turns to another: "And what's your name?"

'"Run-quickly, most high-born one!"

'"Is your name Run-quickly?"

'"It is, most high-born one."

'"Very well, Mr. Run-quickly. And you?" to the third.

'"And-I-run-after-him, most high-born one."

'"I want to know your name."

'"That is my name, And-I-run-after-him, most high-born one."

'"Who gave you that name, you scoundrel?"

'"Good people, most high-born one. There are many good people in this world, most high-born one."

'"Who are these good people?"

'"I have forgotten all about them, most high-born one, if you will kindly excuse me."

'"Have you forgotten them, too?"

'"I have, most high-born one."

'"But you must have had a father and mother, surely? Don't you remember them?"

'"I suppose I must have had them sometime, most high-born one; but I could not tell you for certain. I suppose I have had them, most high-born one."

'"Where have you been all this time?"

'"In the wood, most high-born one."

'"All this time?"

'"All this time."

'"But surely not in the winter?"

'"I don't know what that is, most high-born one."

'"What is your name?"

'"The-hatchet, most high-born one."

'"And you?"

'"Sharpen-the-knives, most high-born one."

'"And you?"

'"Wait-a-bit, most highborn one."

'"So you have forgotten everything, hey?"

'"Just so, most high-born one."

'There he stood laughing, and we all laughed too. We were not always let off so cheaply. I have known him strike us in the face if he did not like our answers. We did not look as if we had been starving, anyhow. "Take them away," says he, "and lock them up in the gaol. And you will stay here," says he to me.

"Come here, sit down." There was a table with paper and pens on it in the room. Says I to myself, "What can he be about?" "Sit down," says he, "on this chair. Take a pen and write;" and takes hold of my ear, and pulls away at it as hard as he can pull. I stare at him like the devil when he looked at the priest. "I can't write, I don't know how, most high-born one," says I.

'"Write," says he.

'"Have pity on me, most high-born one."

'"Write," roars he, and pulls away at my ear, and nearly wrenches it off my head.

'I tell you, brothers, I would rather have been whipped than have my ears pulled like that.'

'Had he gone mad?'

'No, not he. It seems that just about that time a beggar of a clerk in T—— had been embezzling some money which belonged to the Government, and run away with it; and he had ears like mine. So I was taken for him; and he wanted to find out if I could write, and what my writing was like.'

'Clever chap! Did you say he hurt you?'

'I expect he did.'

The convicts laugh.

'Did you write after all?'

'Oh, I just scratched the paper all over with my pen, and then he let me go, naturally. He boxed my ears first, and then sent me to gaol.'

'Can you write?'

'I used to be able to write a little once; but I have forgotten now, since people have been writing with steel pens.'

With similar conversations we beguiled those long, endless days, every one of which was the exact counterpart of the other. If only we might have had books to read! But if the days seemed endless, the nights were worse still. We all went to bed early. A night-light burns dimly by the door, and looks like a bright spot in the darkness. The air begins to get oppressive. Sometimes a patient cannot sleep, and, after tossing about for awhile, he gets up and sits on his bed for an hour or more, resting his night-capped head on his hand as if he were absorbed in thought. I used to watch such patients sometimes for hours together, wondering what they could be thinking about. At other times I would remember my past life. Little details which I would probably never have thought of at other times rose before my mind's eye almost with painful vividness. Or my thoughts would stray away into the future. When should I leave the prison? How? And where would I go to then? Would I ever go back to my old home? And sometimes a faint ray of hope would dawn in my soul. At other times I tried to send myself to sleep by counting one, two, three; and many a time have I counted up to three thousand before I fell asleep. At last some one is moving restlessly on his bed. Oustyanzeff is coughing, poor fellow. I can hear him moan with the pain, and say, 'Oh, Lord, I have sinned!' How strange his plaintive voice sounds in the dark, quiet night! Two men are talking together in that corner; one of them is telling the other about his past life, his wanderings, his wife and children, and the good old times. And

as you listen to the distant whisper you cannot help feeling that he is talking about times and things which will never come back to him any more, and that he himself is an outcast. The other listens impassively. All you can hear is the soft monotonous sound, like the murmur of the water on the distant beach.

Once during a long winter's night I heard one of these tales, and while I was listening to it I felt as if I were in a dream—a feverish dream.

CHAPTER XV.

AKOÚL'KA'S HUSBAND (A TALE).

ONE night, it may have been about midnight, I had been asleep for some time, and woke up suddenly. Nearly all the patients were asleep; the ward was dimly lighted by a small night-light, which stood on a table at the furthest end of the room. I could hear in the distance the heavy steps of the soldiers who were coming down the passage to relieve the guard at our door, and a moment after the butt-ends of their guns striking against the floor. Presently the door of the ward was cautiously opened, and the corporal entered on tiptoe to count the patients and see that everybody was in his proper place. The door was bolted again, a new guard placed before it, and the steps of the soldiers grew fainter as they marched down the long passage. Silence reigned once more.

Suddenly my attention was attracted by the sound of whispering not far from me, as of two people talking together in undertones. Sometimes people will lie side by side for days, even months, without ever exchanging a word, when all at once in the stillness of the night their tongues are loosed,

and each will tell the other the story of his life. These two had evidently been talking for some time, so that I lost the beginning of their conversation. I could at first only catch a word here and there; but as my ear grew more accustomed to their subdued tones I heard the end of the story. Was it wrong in me to listen? I could not sleep; and what else was there for me to do in the long dull hours of the night? One of them had half raised himself on his elbow; he was talking in a wild, excited way, looking eagerly into his hearer's face. The other was sitting up in his bed, and evidently only listening because he could not help it, judging from the bored expression of his face. From time to time he uttered a low growl of assent or sympathy, solacing himself at intervals with frequent pinches of snuff, which he took from a horn snuff-box. He was a military prisoner from the reformatory battalion, called Tcherévin, a disagreeable pedantic fellow and a terrible controversialist. The narrator's name was Shishkóff; he was a tailor by trade, about thirty years old. I had paid but little attention to him hitherto, as he had failed to interest me. He was an empty-headed, capricious fellow, who would sometimes not speak a word for weeks together, then suddenly, without any apparent reason, grow exceedingly talkative and restless; rush about in the prison, tale-bearing, gossiping, quarrelling, and working himself up to such a pitch of excitement that he hardly knew what he did, till he got a sound beating for his pains, when he subsided again into one of his silent moods. He was below middle stature, with a strange, restless

look in his eyes. I have known him frequently begin to talk about something, or relate something or other, grow even excited about it, then suddenly break off or forget what he was talking about and begin to speak of something quite different, which had not the least reference to what he had been saying.

At first I could not make out what he was talking about; he seemed to me to be as usual always straying from his subject. Perhaps he was a little annoyed at Tcherévin's indifference, and tried to persuade himself that he was listening to him after all.

'When he went to market,' he was saying, 'everybody took off his hat to him and bowed low, for he was rich.'

'Did you say he was a tradesman?'

'Yes. You see, ours is a very poor country—oh, very poor! The women have to fetch the water a great way from the river, and work hard day and night in their kitchen-garden; and then they don't even grow cabbage enough for shtshi in winter. Well, as I was saying, he was a rich man, and had a farm and three labourers to work it, and a goodish bit of wood, and sold cattle and honey, and made a mint of money, and was much respected in our town. He was very old, about seventy or so; a large, tall man, with a long grey beard and grey hair. When he went out in his fur coat, lined with foxskin, they all took off their hats to him, saying, "How do you do, Father Aukoudím Trofimytch?" "Thank you," he would reply. You see he was always polite to

every one. "May you live many years, Ankoudím Trofimytch." "How are you getting on in the world?" he would ask. "Times are hard, father; we are getting on poorly enough—and you?" "Pretty well," says he; "but the smoke of our sins rises to heaven and darkens the sun." "May you live many years, Ankoudím Trofimytch." He was always kind and polite, and spoke slowly, as if each word were a rouble and had to be considered before it could be given away. He could read and write, and was always reading his Bible. He would sometimes call his wife, tell her to sit down and listen, and explain the Scriptures to her. She was his second wife; he had married her because he had had no children from his first wife. Márya Stepánovna had two sons—the younger, Vassya, was born when his father was sixty years old—and a daughter, Akoulína, who was then eighteen. She was their eldest child.'

'That's your wife.'

'Wait a bit. Fílka Morósoff comes in first. He says to Ankoudím, says Fílka, "Give me my four hundred roubles. I am not your servant, that you should be higgling and haggling with me and telling me to work, and I don't care to marry your Akoulína. My parents are both dead, and I am a rich man now, and when I have spent all my money I shall enlist as a soldier, and come back to you in ten years as field-marshal general." His father and Ankoudím had been partners, you see, and he claimed his share of the capital. "Take care, you will come to a bad end," says the old man. "That's none of your business, you grey-haired dotard," says Fílka. "I

am not such a miser as you. Why, you would like to eat milk with a needle if you could," says he; "and you are gathering up the dirt in the street to see if you can't make it do for kásha. I tell you, you save money to buy the devil with. And when you see me marrying your Akoúl'ka, you'll know it. Why she has been my mistress all this time!" "How dare you dishonour an honest father and his daughter?" says Ankoudím, trembling with rage. "When did she become your mistress, you blood of a dog, you fat of a snake?"—You see, Fílka told me the whole story himself.—"Don't you call me names," says Fílka, "or I'll take care that she gets no husband at all. Nobody will want to marry her now, not even Mikita Grigórytch. She has been my mistress since last autumn; and I should not take her now, not if you paid me a hundred roubles on the spot."

'Well, the lad did lead a gay life, as he had said he would. He had no end of friends, and in three months all his money was clean gone. He would laugh and say: "When my money's gone I shall sell my house and all I have, and when that's gone I shall enlist or turn vagabond." He was drunk from morning till night, and would drive about in a teléga with two horses and such sweet bells. All the wenches fell in love with him. He also played well on the torba.'

'Was it all true about Akoulína?'

'Stop a bit, and you'll see. My father had just died about that time, and we were left very badly off. My mother did chores for Ankoudím, and made gingerbread for sale, and tried to earn something one

way or the other. We had had a bit of land on the other side of the wood which my father had left us, but we sold it, brother, for I wanted to lead a gay life too. The old woman thought at first she would not let me have any tin, but I beat her till she did.'

'You did very wrong; it is a great sin to beat one's mother.'

'I used to drink from morning till night, my brother. Our house was so old and rotten that I expected every day it would come tumbling about our ears, and the walls were so full of holes that you might have hunted a hare in the rooms. Not a pleasant place to live in at any time, and still less so when one's belly is empty and calling out for food. I was so hungry sometimes that I could have eaten rags, and been thankful for that. Then there was the old woman; she kept a-nagging, nagging at me for being idle, till she drove me clean out of the house, and where should I go to but to Fílka Morósoff. He used to lie on his bed and say to me, "Play on the guitar and dance before me, and I will throw money at you, for I am a rich man now." Oh dear, oh dear, what a time we had together; and what tricks he played! But he never would have anything to do with stolen things, "for," says he, "I am no thief, but an honest man." One day he says to me: "Let us go and tar the gates[1] of Akoúl'ka's house, for I do not want her to marry Mikita Grigorytch." You see, her father had wanted to marry her to Mikita Grigorytch—he was an old

[1] Tarring the gates is the greatest insult which can be done to a woman among the lower classes.

man too, and wore spectacles, and kept a shop; but when he heard what was being said about her, he drew back, and said to her father that such a marriage would only dishonour him, and that, besides, he was really too old to think of marrying at his time of life. So we went and tarred the gates of her house. They made a fine row about it, I tell you! Márya Stepánovna would have killed her on the spot if she could, and the old man said: "In the times of the old patriarchs I would have cut her to pieces with my own hands and burnt her body to ashes; but nowadays the world is full of sin and darkness." The girl was whipped morning, noon, and night; and the people in the next street could hear her screams. Filátka didn't hold his tongue either, but would wink and say: "She's a nice girl, Akoulína is. I know her, and her clean white frocks! They'll not forget me in a hurry," says he. One day I met Akoulína; she had been down to the river to fetch water, and was coming up the riverside with two pails. I called out: "Good morning to you, Akoulína Koudímovna. Allow me to present my respects to your honour. May I ask who is the lover now?" That was all I said, and she never answered me, but looked at me with her large sad eyes—they looked much larger than they were in reality, for she had grown terribly thin of late. Her mother, who was watching her from the doorway, thought that she was flirting with me when she saw her look at me, and cried, "What are you grinning at him for, you shameless hussy;" and fell to beating her again. Why, I have heard that she used to beat her for an

hour by the time, and say, "I should like to kill her—she is no longer daughter of mine."'

'I dare say she deserved it?'

'Wait a bit, grandfather, and you will see. One day I was lying on the stove when my mother came into the room, and began to scold me as usual. "What are you lying down for, you ruffian, you blackguard? Why don't you marry Akoulína? They will be only too glad to give her to you, and pay you three hundred roubles into the bargain." "Why," says I, "don't you know that she is a bad woman?" "You are a fool," says she; "it will all be forgotten when she is your wife. Besides, if she really is what people say about her, why, the better it is for you. We have been talking it over with Márya Stepánovna, and she is not at all opposed to the marriage." "Very well," says I; "tell the old man to pay me down fifty roubles this very moment, and I don't care if I marry her afterwards." I got the money, and I don't think I was sober for one hour till my wedding-day. Then there was that brute of a Fílka Morósoff always threatening me, and saying, "You are to be Akoúl'ka's husband. Take care, I shall break every bone in your body!" Says I to him, "You lie, you dog's-flesh!" Then he called me such names in the street that I came home mad with anger, and told the old woman that I would not marry her unless they gave me fifty roubles more.'

'So they did not mind your marrying her?'

'Bless you, not they! We were as good as they—my father had been even richer than Ankoudím, only he lost nearly all he had in a fire, and never recovered

from the blow. Says Ankoudím to me, "Why, you are as poor as church mice." Says I to him, "Just so; we cannot afford to waste tar on our gates." Says he, "Don't crow over us yet till you have proofs sufficient that she is not an honest girl. You cannot stop every mouth with a kerchief." "Look here," says he; "here is God[1] and here is the threshold—you are not obliged to marry her if you don't want to do it; but first give me back my money." Then I sent Mitry Buykoff to Filátka to tell him that he would be sorry for what he had done, and never left off drinking till my wedding-day, when I just had enough of my wits left to get married. When we came home from church we all sat down at the table, and Mitrofán Stepánytch—that is, her uncle—said to me: "You have not married an honest woman, but I hope she will make you a good wife, and it will be all right now." Ankoudím was also drunk, and burst out crying; and there he sat, with the tears running down his beard. Well, brother, I had put a whip in my pocket before I went to church, thinking that I would show the people, and her too, who was the master.'

'Quite right. It's always better to settle those matters beforehand.'

'Hold your tongue, grandfather. It is the custom in our place to leave the newly-married couple by themselves in a little room, while the rest drink in the large room. So we were left alone, Akoulína and I. She sat down, as pale as death. Her hair

[1] The ikóna, or image of a saint, is often called God. The phrase means, 'You may either stay or go, at your pleasure.'

was as white as flax, and she looked at me with her large eyes without speaking. She always spoke very little, so little that one might think she was dumb. I never could make out why I pulled the whip out of my pocket and laid it on the bed; but just fancy, brother, she was innocent after all!'

'You don't say so?'

'She was, brother mine. And that poor girl had suffered and been tormented, and been innocent all the time. Why did Filátka dishonour and insult her before all the world?'

'H'm!'

'I knelt down before her, folded my hands and said: "Mother Akoulína Koudímovna, can you forgive me for being such a fool and believing what they said about you?" There she sat on the bed, looking me full in the face; and at last she put her arms round my neck and laughed and cried with joy. I rushed into the next room shouting, "Filátka Morósoff had better keep out of my way now, or he may find his days very much shortened upon earth." The old people were quite aghast at the news—the mother nearly fell down at her feet, and such a wail as she struck up! The old man said, "If had known that before, we would have found you a better husband, my beloved daughter." And when we went to church the next Sunday—I in my fur cap and a new kaftan of the finest broadcloth and velveteen sharováry,[1] and she in her new jacket lined with hareskin, with a silk handkerchief on her head—I tell you the people in the street stopped to look at us. I was not bad-look-

[1] Wide trousers, gathered at the bottom, and worn in top-boots.

ing, and though there were better-looking women than Akoulína, she was handsome enough.'

'Yes.'

'Now listen. The day after the wedding I stole out of the house and ran down the street, shouting, "Where is that blackguard, Fílka Morósoff? Let me speak to him, let me see him—the scoundrel!" I was drunk, you see. They caught me at last, and took me home, not without some trouble, I tell you. The news spread in the town that Akoúl'ka had been innocent after all. One day whom should I meet but Fílka Morósoff, with a lot of his friends. "Why don't you sell your wife, and buy brandy with money?" says he. "I know a soldier who did it, and was drunk for three years." Says I to him, "You are a blackguard." Says he to me, "And you are a fool. How can you tell if she was innocent or not, when you were drunk on your wedding-day?" I went straight to them and told them that they had made me drunk on purpose. My mother tried to kick up a row, but I pushed her out of my way, and said, "Your ears are stuffed with gold, mother! Where is Akoúl'ka?" And I beat her for two whole hours till I was too tired to lift my arm. She lay in bed after that for three weeks.'

'Just so,' remarked Tcherévin coolly. 'A wife will never turn out well unless you beat her. But did you ever find her with her lover?'

'N—n—no!' replied Shishkóff after a pause, slowly and with an effort. 'But I had become quite a by-word in the place, and all through that accursed Fílka. He used to say to me, "You have

got a pattern of a wife, and you ought to exhibit her in public that all might admire her." One day he gave a great feast, and asked me to it. All at once he gets up and says: "His wife is so good and kind to everybody, and so well-behaved and ready to oblige. Have you forgotten, old boy, how you helped me to tar her gate, one fine night?" Then he came up to me and took me by the hair, and nearly bowed me down to the ground, saying, "Dance now, Akoúl'ka's husband, dance while I hold you by the hair, just to please me." "You are a scoundrel," cries I. And he says, "I shall take all my friends and come to your house and whip your wife, Akoúl'ka, in their presence and yours." Then—would you believe me?—I never stirred from home for a whole month after that, for fear that he might carry out his threat and dishonour me? And so I began to beat her.'

'What did you beat her for? You can tie people's hands, but not their tongues. It's no good to be always beating and beating. When you have beaten your wife once, you must be kind to her afterwards. That's what she is your wife for.'

Shishkóff was silent for a few moments.

'You see,' said he, after awhile, 'I had got somehow or other in the way of beating her. Some days I would keep at it from morning till night. I did not know what to do with myself when I was not a-beating of her. She used to be sitting in her corner by the window, crying softly to herself, and never saying a word. I could not help feeling sorry for her, and so I beat her! My mother, she tried to stop me by scolding, but she made matters only worse. "I

have a right to kill her if I choose," says I; "and you just hold your tongue, for I have been shamefully ill-used when you made me marry her." At first old Ankoudím took her part, and threatened me with the law and what not; but, bless his soul, I soon put a stop to his coming to my house. Márya Stepánovna was as meek as a lamb. One day she came to me all in tears, and bowed to the ground, and begged me to be kind to her daughter, saying: "Listen to my prayer, Ivan Semenytch; it is a small thing I ask of you, but a great thing for me. Let her see the light once more, my father; have pity on her—forgive her. You know yourself she was an honest woman when you married her." "No," says I; "I will not hear another word." "I am your lord and master," says I, "and I can do with you whatever I please, or rather what Fílka Morósoff pleases, for he is my best friend," says I.'

'So you got intimate again?'

'Bless your eyes, no! Nobody was good enough for him now. He had squandered all his money and property and enlisted. That is to say, he had not enlisted, properly speaking, but a wealthy tradesman in the place had paid him a large sum to go as a substitute for his son, who ought to have gone. It is the custom with us for the substitute to live in the house of the man who has hired him till he joins his regiment; and he is the lord and master there. The money is paid down at once, and a fine life he leads his people sometimes I can tell you—living in the man's house for six months or so, and turning everything upside down, so that you might carry the

saints[1] away. For, you see, he is considered the benefactor of the family; and if they won't do what he wants them to do, he just says, "I won't go in your son's stead." Well, Filátka did his best to turn everything upside down; pulling the master of the house by the beard after dinner every day, and ordering them all about right and left. He had a bath every day, and made them throw brandy on the hot stones instead of water; and all the women in the house had to carry him into the bath-room in their arms. One day he had been drinking with some friends, and when he came home he stopped in the street in front of their house and shouted, "Pull the fence down; I will not go in through the gate." So they had to make an opening in the fence to get him in. At last the time came for him to join his regiment. All the people ran out into the street to see Filátka Morósoff leave the town. There he sat in his teléga, bowing right and left. Akoulína happened to be coming out of our kitchen-garden just as he was passing through our street and by our house. "Stop!" shouted he, and jumping down from the teléga, he bowed to the ground before her and said, "My soul, my red berry, I have loved you these two years, and now I am going away to my regiment. Forgive me all the harm I have done you, virtuous daughter of a virtuous father. I am a miserable wretch!" And he bowed again to the ground. Akoúl'ka seemed startled at first, but she soon recovered, and said, bowing low, "Forgive me also if I have done any-

[1] I.e., the ikónas, who ought not to look upon his disgraceful conduct.

thing to harm you. I bear you no grudge." I ran after her into the isba. "What did you say to him, you flesh of a dog?" And—would you believe it?—she looked me full in the face, and said, "Yes, I love him better than all the world!"'

'Oh, oh!'

'I did not speak to her again that day till night-fall, when I said to her, "Akoúl'ka, I will kill you!" I did not sleep a wink that night, and got up towards morning and went into the passage to drink some kvas. The day was dawning; I went back into the room and said to her, "Akoúl'ka, get yourself ready and come with me to our field." I had spoken before of my intention of going there, and my mother knew all about it. "I am glad you are going to look after things a little," says she. "It's reaping-time, and I hear the labourer has been in bed for the last three days." I got the teléga ready without saying a word. You must know that our town is built near a big pine wood, about fifteen versts long, and our field was on the other side of the wood. When we had driven for about three versts through the wood, I stopped the horse, and said to my wife, "Get out, Akoúl'ka, your last hour has come." She obeyed, trembling with terror, and stood there before me without saying a word. "I am sick and tired of you," said I; "say your prayers." She had beautiful thick hair; I grasped her plaits, and wound them round and round my hand, and pulled her down, took her between my knees, bent her head back, and drew the knife across her throat. When I heard her shriek and saw the red blood gush out of the wound, I threw down

my knife, laid her on the ground, put my arms round her, and there we lay—I wailing and weeping, and she shrieking and struggling to get away from me, while her warm blood was flowing over my hands and face. At last I got so frightened that I got up and ran away, and never stopped running till I got home, and there I hid myself in our old bath-house. It was a ruined place, and nobody came near it now. There I crept under a shelf and sat there till night.'

'And Akoúl'ka?'

'It seems that she got up and tried to go home after I left her, but never got there after all, for they found her not far from the place where——'

'So you did not kill her quite?'

'Yes.' Shishkóff hesitated.

'There is a certain vein,' remarked Tcherévin, and they say that if you don't cut it through at once the person will never die, even if they should lose every drop of blood in their body.'

'But she did die; they found her dead at night. The police were informed of it, and they searched for me and found me in the bath-house. I have been here four years,' he added, after a pause.

'H'm, no woman ever turns out well except you beat her,' remarked Tcherévin coolly, helping himself to another pinch of snuff. 'After all, my friend, continued he, 'you made a fool of yourself. I remember once finding my wife with her lover. So I took a thick leather thong, and called her into the barn and beat her, asking her at every stroke to whom she had sworn to be true when she was married, till she cried out, "I will wash your feet and drink the water." Her name was Avdotya.'

CHAPTER XVI.

SUMMER-TIME.

April had come with its warm sunny days and a sweet perfume of spring in the air. We were within a week or two of Easter. I have frequently noticed the peculiarly irritating and exciting effect which spring weather has on prisoners. It seems as if the memory of the old times when they too were free like the bird who sings over their heads in the blue sky, is more vivid within their souls on a warm spring day than on a bleak and dreary day in autumn and winter. Yet they look forward to the fine days eagerly, only to grow more restless and impatient when they have come at last. Even the more peaceable and patient convicts, who seldom grumbled with their lot and quarrelled with their comrades, seemed to find the restraint which life in a prison must necessarily impose more irksome at such seasons than at any other times. Hardly a day passed without brawls or quarrels; at times the prison seemed to have been turned into a Bedlam. Many a time when we were out at work on the banks of the Irtysh have I watched some poor fellow looking wistfully across the river towards the immense Kirghise steppe, which begins on the other bank and

stretches far away towards the south—further than the eye can reach. Many a time have I seen their breasts heaving and heard a deep sigh, as if they too longed to breathe once more the free air of the steppe. 'Ekhma!'[1] sighs the convict prisoner; and with a sudden movement, as if he wanted to shake off the thoughts and dreams which trouble him, he thrusts his spade deep into the earth or snatches up the load of bricks which lies by his side ready to be carried away.

How heavy the chains seem on such days! This is the time when not only in Siberia but all over Russia also, those who are known as God's people escape from their gloomy dungeons and hide themselves in the woods and forests. The long dreary winter-time lies behind them, and they wander about the land eating and drinking what they find, what it pleases God to send them, and at night lying down to sleep in the fields or woods, looking up to the bright stars above them, without care for the morrow, like the birds of the forest. Yet those who want to enlist in the army of General Kouckoushkine must make up their minds to rough it occasionally. Food is often very scanty—sometimes they have to go without for days altogether; then there is the constant danger of being discovered and brought back to the prison; and, tortured by hunger and fear, they will often rob, steal, and even murder. There is a Siberian proverb which says, 'The convict is like a baby—he cries for what he sees.'

There are some men who are born tramps. I

[1] An interjection.

have frequently heard of convicts who, after their term of imprisonment had expired, had been comfortably settled for five or six years in a convict colony, got married and had several children, disappearing one fine morning, to the grief of their family and the amazement of their neighbours. Their heart yearns for the wild, lonely life in the Siberian forests; it is to them the embodiment of earthly happiness, for it is a free life. There was one such tramp in our prison. He had spent his whole life wandering about from one end of Russia to the other, and escaping from prison. I think he had been as far south as the Danube and the Caucasian mountains, and as far east as Eastern Siberia, not far from Okhotzk. Perhaps if he had lived in different circumstances he might have turned out a second Robinson Crusoe. I never heard that he had committed any crime, and am quite at a loss to say why he should have been sent to a convict prison. He was a small, wiry man, about fifty years old I should think, with a remarkably placid—I might almost say stolid—face. In summer-time he liked to bask in the sun, singing softly to himself. He spoke very little, and ate still less, living principally on bread. I do not think that he ever bought a kalátch or a glass of liquor in all his life, for he never seemed to have a copeck in his pocket, and besides, if he had had money, I do not think he could have counted it. Nothing ever seemed to excite him or put him out of temper. He was the only one beside myself who fed our prison dogs, for dogs are reputed unclean in Russia, and a Russian

peasant would no more feed a dog from his hand than he would eat a hare. The man told me that he had been married twice, and had children in some remote spot in Russia. It was generally thought that he would run away again ere long, and everybody was wondering how he would manage it this time; but he either felt that he was too old to expose himself to the hardships of a vagrant life, or else his time had not yet come, and he went on living quietly in the new sphere in which it had pleased Providence to place him. There are but few who, having once made up their mind to escape, are able to carry out their design—perhaps not one in a hundred—yet the other ninety-nine solace themselves in their captivity by imagining various ways of escaping, and thinking of all the places where they might have been in safety if they only could have got there. But those who have served perhaps once or twice in General Koucoushkine's army remember that time with mixed pride and regret, and live over in memory every moment of that wild life of freedom. The technical term for escaping is, in prison slang, 'to change one's lot in life.' It is a remarkably well-chosen one, for the convict knows when he makes up his mind to escape that he will never, or hardly ever, retain the freedom which he may succeed in obtaining for a time at least. The chances are ten to one that he will be caught, and perhaps be sentenced to another long term of penal servitude if during his wanderings he has been guilty of some fresh crime; but he hopes that wherever he may be sent it may be a new prison or colony, as by this time he has grown heartily tired

of the old one. And a new prison is rather a pleasant change after all. It is by no means an unusual sight to see crowds of these runaways come back to the towns when the cold weather sets in, and ask to be admitted to the gaols, if they have not succeeded on their wanderings in finding a place where they may winter in safety. They cheerfully spend the cold season in gaol, hoping to escape again when the warm weather comes.

We had been divided into seven groups of thirty men each, according to the number of weeks in Lent, and each group regularly attended daily services for a whole week, as is the custom in the Greek Church previous to taking the holy communion. My turn came in the sixth week. We did not go out to work, but attended service two or three times daily in a church which was not very far from the prison. I had not been inside a church for a long time, and the Lenten Service, with its solemn prayers and the beautiful ceremonies by which the Greek Church prepares its faithful believers to meet the glad Eastertide, seemed to take me back to my boyhood and my old home, and evoked a host of old memories in my heart. I liked the walk to church in the early morning when the ground was crisp and hard with last night's frost. Our escort never came into the church with us, but remained outside. We always stood near the door at the furthermost end of the building, where we could occasionally catch a glimpse of the priest's black robe or his bald head, and hear the voice of the deacon repeating the prayers. I remembered how when I was a boy I had liked to

watch the poor people who were huddled together at the church door give way respectfully to some stout gentleman or a well-dressed pious lady. I used to think that poor people prayed in altogether a different manner from what we did. They seemed to bow down to the ground more frequently, and to pray with more humility and fervour than we, as if they were conscious of their lowliness. Little did I think then that it would be my fate one day to stand in those places—aye, in still lower places than they ever stood in, for they were honest people and we were felons in chains, from whom the people recoiled instinctively as they passed by us. I always had a strange pleasure in accepting the alms which charitable souls bestowed freely upon us. The convicts prayed with great fervour, and never failed to bring their mite to buy a taper with, or to put it into the church fund. Perhaps in doing so they said to themselves, 'I, too, am a human being still, and after all we are all alike in God's eyes!' We took the communion at early service. When the priest, holding the cup in his hand, spoke the words, 'but they received me as a robber,' all the men prostrated themselves, as if those words had been addressed to them.

Easter Day was a repetition of Christmas Day, except that we had an egg and a slice of wheaten bread apiece allotted us over and above our usual meals, and that the day was warm and bright, so that instead of sitting in a stifling hot room we sat out in the yard. Loads of bread and other eatables were again sent from the town, the priest and the Governor paid their

customary visits, the shtshi was remarkably good, and the convicts got drunk, and fought and quarrelled with each other.

During the summer-time the men were principally employed in building, or in painting, white-washing, and cleaning the Government buildings in the town. The worst workmen, and the convicts who knew no trade, were sent to the brick-kiln to make bricks. This was considered the hardest work. The brick-kiln was three or four versts distant from the fortress, and every morning a party of fifty or more convicts used to start for the kiln at 6 A.M. They took some bread with them, as it would have taken too much time to come home for dinner, and did not dine till late at night, when they returned from their work tired and exhausted with their labour. They always made a point of telling us that they were the hardest-worked men in the prison; nevertheless, they seemed rather to like going to the kilns, as they were situated on the banks of the Irtysh, at some distance from the town, where they could breathe the fresh air and smoke freely, and occasionally lie down on the grass for half an hour or so and take a nap. I worked either in the turner's shop, as before, or ground alabaster, and was occasionally employed in carrying bricks. I liked this kind of work, because I found that it developed my muscular power. I began by carrying eight bricks, weighing 12 lbs. each, across the rampart to a building which was about two hundred feet distant from the kiln, but gradually got so strong as to be able to carry twelve bricks at a time. I have said that I liked carrying

bricks because I found that the exercise did me good; but the principal reason for my liking this work, such as it was, was that the kilns were situated, as I have said before, on the banks of the Irtysh. I frequently mention this spot, because it was the only place where we might turn our back on the prison, and for the moment forget that it had ever existed. How I hated the very sight of the prison and the buildings which surrounded it, especially the house where our Major lived, and which to me was an accursed spot. The banks of the river were the only place where I could forget my misery, and gaze upon the immeasurable desert. Every object seemed precious to me; the warm, bright sun in the deep blue sky, and the distant song of the Kirghise which was wafted to us from the opposite bank. Sometimes I could see a light cloud of smoke rising slowly in the air, and distinguish the miserable hut of some nomad of the steppe, and a woman watching a couple of sheep near it. Presently a bird would fly up in the clear transparent air, then, sinking rapidly, skim along the surface of the water to dip its wings in it, rise again, and disappear in the blue sky. How wistfully I watched its flight till I could hardly distinguish the black speck. Even a poor little flower, which I found one day in early spring in a crevice of a stone on the banks of my beloved river, had a peculiar interest for me. Oh! the bitter grief and the loneliness of my first summer in the prison! I shall never, never forget it!

The evenings were lovely when the sun, which had been shining on the yard all day long, set at last, and the short, cool night of the steppe came on. The

men either lounged about in the yard, enjoying the cool of the evening, or else assembled in the kitchen to gossip or talk over the events of the day. One day suddenly the rumour spread that our Major was going to be discharged. Convicts are like children, they will believe almost anything that is told them; and although the news had been brought by Kvássoff, who had the reputation of being the greatest gossip and blockhead in the prison, and who told a lie every time he opened his mouth, they discussed it eagerly, till they felt vexed with themselves and each other for having believed it.

'I should like to see the man who will put him down,' cries one. 'His back is broad enough; he'll weather any storm, I warrant you.'

'But there are bigger chaps than he in this world, I dare say,' replies another, a smart young Hotspur, who has seen something of the world, and who is the greatest arguer the world has ever seen.

'Birds of a feather,' remarks in an undertone a third, a grey-haired old man who is eating shtshi in a corner by himself.

'I suppose you expect those bigger chaps to come and ask your advice whether they had better remove him or not?' asks a fourth, running his fingers along the strings of his balalaïka.

'And why should they not, pray?' retorts young Hotspur, angrily. 'Instead of squabbling about it now and then, drawing back when the time comes to act, you had better all stand up and say your say if they should ask us.'

'And get into a scrape,' quietly remarks the man with the balalaïka.

'The other day'—continued Hotspur, not heeding the interruption—'the other day we had saved a little flour—scraped it together, my brethren, every particle of it. 'Twas our own, and we wanted to sell it. Of course he heard all about it directly—the artél'shtshik told him—and he took it away. I should like to know what you call this. Was he right or wrong?'

'It can't be helped.'

'Can't be helped! I tell you I shall complain to the Government Inspector, and then you will see if it can't be helped.'

'What's that about a Government Inspector?'

'He is quite right, boys. There is a Government Inspector coming to look after things a bit,' remarks another young fellow, who was much respected by the rest for his shrewdness and literary tastes. He had received a tolerable education, been clerk in some government office, and had read the 'Duchess of Lavallière' and similar books. A perfect storm of questions and exclamations broke out; but he pretended not to notice it, and turning to the cook asked him coolly if he had any liver left. Our cooks frequently used to buy a large piece of liver or some other delicacy of that kind, roast it, and cut it up into small pieces, which they sold to the convicts.

'How much do you want?' asks the cook. 'For a grosh or for two groshes?'

'For two; that will make other people's mouths water,' answered the convict. 'It is quite true, boys; a general is coming all the way from St. Petersburg

to make a tour of inspection through Siberia. I heard it myself from the Commandant's servants.'

This intelligence creates great excitement. Everybody wants to know who it is, and whether it is a real general[1] or not; and if so, if he is a more important personage than our generals. Convicts take a great interest in their superiors, and will often quarrel about who is of the higher rank or who has the greater influence. They pride themselves in showing off their knowledge of the world and the minute differences of rank and station, as a convict who talks glibly about generals, officers, and decorations is considered as having moved in good society before he became a prisoner.

'Then it is true, after all, brothers, that we are to have a new governor,' remarks Kvássoff, who had been the first to bring the news about the impending change. He is a short, red-faced man, easily excited and rather stupid.

'He'll bribe him,' remarks the gloomy grey-haired convict from his corner. He has finished his shtshi by this time.

'Won't he, though!' says another. 'He has stolen money enough to go and bribe a general now. They say he proposed to the protopop's daughter.'

'But they wouldn't have him—he is not rich enough for them. Bless you, he carries all his fortune on his back. He's gambled away every copeck at Easter. Fed'ka told me so.'

[1] There are military as well as civil generals in Russia. Any Tchinovnik who has obtained the predicate 'your excellency' is equal in rank to a general, and is commonly called so.

'Aye, aye—the boy's no spendthrift, but there's a hole in his pocket where the money slips through.'

'I have been married myself, my brothers; and let me tell you it is a bad job for a poor man,' observes Skourátoff, who has just appeared on the scene.

'Oh, here you are at last! We have been expecting you this last half-hour,' politely replies the clerk. 'You are a cursed fool, Kvássoff! Do you think that the Major will dare to offer a bribe to a general; and that the general has come all the way from St. Petersburg to look after the Major's doings? You are an ass, Kvássoff, let me tell you that.'

'As if a general would refuse a bribe!' remarks a sceptic in the crowd.

'He'll take it readily enough, if it's only a good big one, I warrant you.'

'To be sure, it must be a good big one. The bigger the chap the bigger the bribe.'

'A general will always take a bribe,' says Kvássoff, decisively.

'Did you ever offer him one?' sneeringly asks Bakloushin, who has just come into the kitchen. 'I dare say you have never even seen a general in your life.'

'To be sure I have.'

'That's a lie!'

'Take care that I don't catch you telling lies!'

'Boys, make him tell us what general he knows. Out with it, for I know them all.'

'I have seen General Siebert,' answers Kvássoff, hesitatingly.

'Siebert? There is no such general in the army. There may have been a Lieutenant Siebert for aught I know, and I dare say he has examined your back pretty close once or twice, and you took him for a general in your fright.'

'Hear me,' cries Skourátoff, 'for I am a married man. There used to be a General Siebert in the army, and he lived in Moscow, and was a Russian in spite of his German name. He always went to confession once a year to the Russian priest, and drank water like a duck. Every blessed morning he swallowed forty tumblers of water from the river Moskva—his own servant told me so. They said the doctors had ordered him to do so for his health.'

'I suppose he must have had quite a fishpond in his belly,' remarks the convict with the balalaïka.

'Hold your tongue! This is a serious matter, and you chatter like a parcel of old women. Tell me all about the Government Inspector, my brother,' anxiously asks Martynoff, an old military prisoner.

'I don't believe it,' says another sceptic. 'I wonder where they get all their news from. It's all nonsense.'

'No, 'taint this time!' emphatically remarks Koulíkoff, who has not spoken yet. Koulíkoff is a dignified-looking, middle-aged man—a veterinary surgeon by profession, but does not object to selling spirits in the prison. His manners are haughty and supercilious, and he is proud of them. He is a clever fellow who has seen a good deal of the world; he speaks slowly, weighing each word as if it were a rouble. 'It's quite true, brother,' he continues

calmly, 'I heard last week that a general has been sent by the Government on an inspection tour through Siberia. They will take good care to make him see only what he should see, and nothing more, and they will bribe him, but it won't be Eight-eyes this time —he knows better than that. There are different kinds of generals, my brother—good ones and bad ones, great ones and little ones. Only, mark my words, there is no chance of our getting rid of our precious Major. For we are dumb folks, and the officers are not going to complain of each other, that's certain. The Inspector will just see what he is expected to see, and go away and report that he found everything in apple-pie order.'

'They say the Major is much frightened; he has been drinking hard this morning.'

'And is drinking now. Fed'ka said so.'

'You will never wash a black dog white. This isn't the first time in his life that he has been drinking.'

'What's to become of us if even a general can't do anything to help us? We must help ourselves, and let them see that we won't stand this tomfoolery any longer,' cried the convicts.

The news that a Government Inspector was coming spreads like wildfire in the prison. Groups of men are standing in the yard, talking and gesticulating excitedly. Others maintain a dignified silence; some remain indifferent. Several men are sitting on the steps with their balalaïkas, chatting or singing. In short, we are all in a highly excited state that night.

At 10 P.M. the roll was called, and we were locked in for the night. We never got much sleep during the short summer nights, as we were roused at five in the morning, and it was always past eleven o'clock before the convicts settled down to sleep. There were frequent card-parties at night, the same as in winter. And, even if the men had lain down quietly at ten o'clock, the heat and stuffiness of the room was so great, in spite of the open window, and the fleas so numerous, that sleep was out of the question. The convicts tossed about on their pallets like patients in a fever, gasping for air and trying vainly to protect themselves from the bites of our tormentors. We were never free from fleas, not even in winter, but they increased and multiplied in summer so that everything was literally covered with them. Yet it is possible to get accustomed even to fleabites, as I know from personal experience. They bit and plagued me till I was nearly frantic with the constant irritation, and when towards morning they seemed to have exhausted their energy at last and I was just sinking into slumber, the *rêveil* was sounded at the gate, and the roll of the drum roused me from my short sleep. How often have I listened to those sounds, drawing my fur coat tighter round me, and cursing them from my heart at the thought that this would go on to-morrow, and the day after, and so on for many years till I was free again. And then I wondered if that time would ever come at all. By this time everybody was up and dressing, and I had to jump up hurriedly and follow their example.

to be in time for the roll-call. After all, we might always have a nap in the afternoon.

The rumour about the Government Inspector was confirmed. An officer of very high rank had been sent from St. Petersburg on a tour of inspection through Siberia, and had arrived in Toból'sk. We heard that the inhabitants of our town were in a state of great excitement. There were to be balls, dinners, and receptions given in honour of the Inspector. Numbers of convicts were hard at work in the fortress, repairing the roads, painting the fences and posts, whitewashing the walls, etc. The men were even more excited than our officers, and one or two of the more energetic proposed even that complaints should be made in case the Inspector should ask if we were satisfied. Our Major was worse than ever; he paid us frequent visits, found fault with everybody and everything, and hardly a day passed that some poor fellow was not flogged for some slight offence which, at other times, would have been unnoticed. At that same time a little incident happened in the prison which, however, rather pleased the Major instead of annoying him, as might have reasonably been expected. There had been a quarrel between two convicts, Sómoff and Gavríla; and Sómoff had, in a fit of passion, stabbed his opponent with an awl in the breast, just below the heart. Gavríla, or Gavrílka as he was commonly called—indeed, I do not think he had any other name—was a tramp and vagabond. Sómoff belonged to a family of wealthy Siberian peasants. It had consisted originally of five members—the father, three

sons, and an uncle. They were large landed proprietors, had several shops, and carried on an extensive trade in furs and leather, but it was generally said that they had made most of their money (they had a capital of 300,000 roubles) by usury and by buying and selling stolen goods, etc. More than half of the peasants of their district were their debtors, or depended on them for their subsistence by working for them. They were shrewd, clever fellows, and all went well with them for a time, till, unfortunately for them, a personage of high rank happening to stop at their house on a journey through that part of the country, took such a fancy to the old father that he always made a point of stopping with them whenever he had business in that part of the country, which was often the case. This sudden favour turned their heads completely; they grew more insolent and overbearing in their behaviour, both towards their superiors and their inferiors, openly defied the law, and made themselves universally hated and feared. But their hour came at last. They had a large farm about ten versts from the town. One year, towards the beginning of autumn, they had sent six Kirghises who had been in their employment for a long time to work on the farm, and one night all the six men were murdered. The suspicion fell on the Sómoffs—it was said that they owed the men more money than they cared to pay, being very avaricious in spite of their immense fortune, and that they had murdered them to get rid of them altogether. They were arrested, tried, and found guilty. During the trial many of their other crimes and misdeeds were

revealed. The old father died, their large fortune was confiscated, and the sons and their uncle were sentenced to penal servitude for twelve years. One of the young men and the uncle had been sent to our prison. And after all they were innocent of the murder. The real murderer turned out to be the same Gavrílka, a deserter and vagabond, who, with three other ruffians, had murdered the Kirghises. He and his companions had broken into the farm-house with the intention of robbing it on that autumn night. I do not know whether he ever confessed his crime, but the convicts firmly believed that he was guilty. He had known the Sómoffs formerly, and had been useful to them in many ways, and was now in the prison for a short time for deserting his regiment.

The Sómoffs were not liked in the prison, for what reason I cannot tell. The nephew was a clever, pleasant young man, who got on well with everybody, but his uncle—the same who stabbed Gavrílka with the awl—was a tiresome, stupid fellow. He was always squabbling and quarrelling with one or the other of his fellow-prisoners, and had already got many a good drubbing for his pains. Gavrílka, on the contrary, was a great favourite with everybody for his jovial, easy-going disposition. He had never had any quarrel before with the Sómoffs, although they knew very well that they were suffering for his crime; but, somehow or other, they had always held aloof from each other, and he had never taken the slightest notice of them, when one fine day he began to brag about the favours which had been shown him

by some girl. The old man grew jealous and stabbed him.

Though the Sómoffs had lost all their fortune they were the richest people in the prison, had a samovár, and drank tea whenever they liked. Our Major knew it, and hated them both with a vengeance. It was visibly his great aim and object to catch them tripping that he might wreak his anger upon them. The Sómoffs ascribed this hatred to his disappointment at not having received any present from them.

If Sómoff had pushed the awl a little further he would have killed Gavrílka, but as it was the wound turned out to be a mere scratch. The case was at once reported to the Major, who arrived breathless with excitement and not at all displeased at having at last succeeded in catching one of his enemies *flagrante delicto*. He treated Gavrílka with as much tenderness as if he had been his own son.

'Do you think you will be able to walk as far as the hospital, my friend? I think you had better drive there. Tell them to get the teléga ready,' shouted he hurriedly to the sergeant-at-arms.

'But I don't feel any pain, most high-born one, indeed I don't. He only scratched me a little with the awl, most high-born one.'

'We will see about that, my friend; it is a very dangerous place—oh, very dangerous indeed, just beneath the heart. The ruffian! And you, you,' roared he, turning towards Sómoff, 'see if I don't make you smart for it! To the guardroom with you!'

He kept his promise. Sómoff was tried, and though the wound was a mere scratch it was ruled that there had been the intention of murdering his adversary. He was sentenced to one thousand strokes, and I do not remember to how many more years of penal servitude. The Major was delighted of course.

At last the Government Inspector arrived in the town. He came to inspect the prison on the day after his arrival, which happened to be a holiday. Everything had been cleaned, whitewashed, and put in order a few days before he came. The men had been newly shaved, and were dressed in clean white clothes. Our uniform in summer consisted of a white linen jacket and trousers, with a black circle about two inches in diameter sewn on the back. We had been drilled for a whole hour how to answer in case he should wish us good-morning. The Major rushed about like mad. An hour before he came we all stood rooted to our places like posts. He drove up to the prison at one o'clock; and came in looking very haughty and stern, followed by a large suite composed principally of officers, though there was one civilian among them, a tall, handsome man in a dress-coat and shoes. He had also come from St. Petersburg. The General repeatedly spoke to him with marked politeness, to the great astonishment of the convicts, who would hardly believe their eyes when they saw so illustrious a personage as the General—there was something so imposing about him, and he occupied so high a position in St. Petersburg that I do not wonder the governors of the convict prisons in Western Siberia trembled in their shoes

at the very sight of him—treat a civilian with such deference. We heard afterwards who he was, and learnt his name. I cannot help thinking that our Major, in his tight coat with the orange collar, and with his bloodshot eyes and copper-coloured face, did not produce a very favourable impression on the Inspector. He had taken off his glasses out of respect to the visitor, and stood a little apart from the others, bolt upright, watching for an opportunity to show his zeal by flying to carry out the slightest wish of his excellency. But his excellency had no wishes, or if he had them he did not ask our Major to carry them out. He walked through the rooms without making any remark; went even into the kitchen and tasted the shtshi. Some one pointed to me: 'So-and-so, a nobleman.' 'Ah!' said the General, 'how does he behave now?' 'Very well, your excellency,' was the answer. The General nodded his head and left the prison a few moments after, leaving the convicts dazzled but dissatisfied on the whole. Nobody had said a word about the Major, and he had been quite sure that nobody would speak out.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUR PETS.

THE next important event in the prison, which took place soon after the visit of the Government Inspector, was the purchase of a horse. It had always been the custom to keep a horse in the prison to fetch fresh water from the river, carry away the offal, etc. A convict had been appointed to groom it, to perform the offices of water-carrier, etc. Our Brownie was a hard-worked horse, who had served us faithfully for many years, when one fine morning, just about St. Peter's Day, it fell down in the yard and died after having dragged in its last barrel of water. A large crowd immediately assembled round it, the convicts mourned over their dead Brownie, speculated on the possible causes of its death, even quarrelled about it, looked very wise, shook their heads, but all in vain—the poor creature remained dead, lying on its side with its body all bloated and distended. The Major was duly informed of the tragic event, and he gave the necessary orders to buy a new horse. Accordingly, on St. Peter's Day after early mass, when the men were all assembled in the yard in their holiday clothes, the horse-dealers made their appearance. The convicts had been entrusted with the purchase, and very proud and happy they were that on such an

important occasion the Major should have defe to their better judgment. He had acted wisely, would have been difficult even for the most cr horse-dealer to deceive a crowd of two hundred fifty men, most of whom were connoisseurs.

It was comical to see the startled air with wl the horse-dealers looked around on finding th selves suddenly in the midst of a crowd of sha fettered criminals in the very courtyard of a con prison, and the anxious glances which they cast f time to time towards the soldiers who had ushe them in and were standing at some distance. I n not say that our men exerted themselves to utmost in choosing a horse, and displayed a n astonishing knowledge of all the good and qualities which this quadruped is said to poss They examined each animal submitted to their spection most carefully from the tip of its nose the end of its tail, looking into its eyes, nose, mo and ears, and feeling it all over with such an ai importance as if the future welfare of the pri depended on their purchase. The Tcherkesses e jumped on the backs of the horses, their eyes sparkl with pleasure, and chattered excitedly among th selves in their dialect, showing their white teeth nodding their heads.

Three horses were rejected one after other, but the fourth found favour in the e of the connoisseurs. It was a handsome, str young animal with a bright, good-natured fe The man asked thirty roubles for it, but the c victs would not give more than twenty-five. At l

after a good deal of higgling, they got it for twenty-eight roubles. The Major approved of the choice; one of the men ran into the kitchen, and reappeared presently with a piece of bread and salt to welcome the horse to its new home, and the animal was conducted into its stable with great solemnity, where it was visited by all the convicts in turns, who stroked its nose and patted it on the neck. Towards evening Brownie was harnessed to the water-cart, and we all crowded round to see how he would fulfil his new duties. Román, our groom and water-carrier, cast frequent glances of admiration upon the new horse. He was a staid, silent man, about fifty years old, of a very good-natured kindly disposition; his only passions were horses and snuff. He had been our groom for many years, as this was our third Brownie. The convicts had a great predilection for brown horses, and used to say that they matched the prison walls, and Román shared their opinion. It has frequently been noticed that all Russian coachmen are steady, silent men, and it is commonly said that associating with horses renders men grave and staid in their demeanour. Román was a first-rate groom, and when our last Brownie died, nobody, not even the Major, thought of ascribing this catastrophe to Román's negligence—it had been God's will to smite the horse, that was all. Brownie soon became the pet of the prison; convicts are not a very loving race, but they would frequently pet and stroke him. At night, when Román had come up from the river with his barrel, and was shutting the gates which the corporal had opened to let him in, Brownie would

stand still in the yard waiting for him, and looking round from time to time to see if he were coming. 'Go home,' shouts Román, and Brownie goes straight to the kitchen door and stops there of his own accord, waiting for the cooks and housemaids to come with their pails to fetch the water.

'Good fellow, Brownie!' says one.

'He understands every word you say to him, just like a Christian,' says another.

'Clever fellow, Brownie!'

Brownie shakes his head and snorts as if he understood and appreciated these praises. A piece of bread and salt is brought from the kitchen, and Brownie eats it, shaking his head as if to say, 'I know you well; I am a good horse and you are a good fellow.'

It was one of my favourite pleasures to feed Brownie. I liked to look at his pretty face and feel his soft warm lips on my hand.

Our convicts were fond of animals, and I think it is a great pity that the regulations of the prison and the lack of space do not admit of their keeping pets. There is hardly anything more capable of softening their hearts and making them less coarse and brutal than the care for some living being.

I have already mentioned my friend Shárik,[1] a clever, good-natured dog who lived in the prison unloved and uncared for, because a dog is reputed unclean by the common people in Russia. He slept somewhere in a corner in the yard, fed on garbage, and, although nobody ever took the slightest interest

[1] Literally 'small ball.'

in him, he knew every convict individually, and evidently considered himself as belonging to us all. When the convicts came home from their work at night, and the corporal was called from the guard-room to open the gates and let them in, Shárik would run to meet them, wagging his tail and looking wistfully into their faces as they passed in one by one as if expecting a kind word or a caress. But for many years nobody responded to his mute appeal except myself, and for this reason he loved me better than the rest. I do not remember now where our other dog, Bjélka,[1] came from, but the third, Koultjápka. I had brought in one day when he was still a blind puppy. Bjélka was a curious-looking creature; he had been run over by a cart in his youth, and been crushed quite out of shape. When viewed from a distance, especially if he were running, he looked liked two white animals grown together. His coat was mangy, and there was hardly any hair left on his tail, which he carried constantly between his legs as if ashamed to exhibit it. Poor creature, he seemed to feel that he had been harshly treated by Nature, and to have made up his mind to bear his hard lot patiently. He never was known to bark or even to growl, but spent most of his time behind the prison seeking for food. Whenever any one approached him, he had a trick of throwing himself on his back and lying there perfectly still with an air of profound humility, as if to say, 'You may do with me whatever you please—I shall not resist you.' And every convict seemed to consider it his duty to kick

[1] Literally 'squirrel.'

the poor inoffensive brute with his heavy boot. Bjélka never whined when he was kicked, but if the blow had been exceptionally severe he would lift up his voice and howl mournfully. He had the same trick of rolling over before Shárik or any other dog, and I have often seen him when attacked by some big ruffian of a dog lie on his back without moving a muscle. Dogs, like human beings, like to see their equals fear and respect them, and the most ferocious cur generally cooled down very quickly at the sight of a timid fellow-creature lying on its back with its paws up in the air, and after looking at him pensively for some time and sniffing him all over, he generally walked away, much to the relief of Bjélka, who immediately jumped up and went about his own business, or perhaps limped after a string of dogs who were escorting some interesting young lady of their acquaintance home. He never sought to find favour in her eyes, poor fellow, but it was a comfort to him in his sad life to limp after her from afar. I have often wondered what he could be thinking about when he was lying on his back before a big dog. Was he afraid of being bitten? I once stroked him. This was so unprecedented an event in the poor dog's life that he crouched down on the ground trembling with ecstasy and whining loudly. I often stroked him after that time, and he was so grateful to me that he could never meet me without howling piteously.

Poor Bjélka, his sad end corresponded to his life. He was torn to pieces by other dogs on the rampart behind the prison.

Our third dog, Koultjápka, was quite a different creature from the other two. I took him from his mother in one of the workshops when he was still a blind puppy and brought him into the prison. I cannot tell what made me take him, unless that I liked the thought of having something to care for. Shárik at once took him under his protection, and slept with him, and when he grew older he even allowed him to take sundry liberties with him, such as biting his ears, pulling his tail, etc., and played with him as old dogs will play with puppies. It was a remarkable fact that Koultjápka never seemed to grow any taller, but longer and broader. His coat was curly and of a pretty mouse colour, one of his ears grew up and the other down. He was of a very excitable nature, and could never be taught to restrain his feelings, and whenever he heard my voice calling him he would rush up wildly to meet me, howling with joy and rolling over and over in his hurry. I had grown very fond of the little creature, and it seemed as if his life was going to be a happy one. But fate had decreed it otherwise. One fine day the convict Neüstroeff, who was by trade a tanner and ladies' shoemaker, seemed struck by something in him. He called Koultjápka, felt his fur, and stroked him gently. The dog, who suspected no evil, whined with pleasure. The next morning he had disappeared. I searched everywhere for him, but in vain; and it was not till a fortnight after that I learned that Neüstroeff had killed my dog and taken his fur to line a pair of velvet house-boots which a lady in the town had ordered. He even had the impudence

to show me the boots when they were ready. The fur was very soft and fine, and I dare say fetched a good price. Poor Koultjápka!

It was by no means an unusual thing for the convicts to steal or buy dogs with a fine glossy coat, kill them, and use their fur for lining boots, etc. I remember seeing one day two convicts in earnest consultation in a corner of the yard. One of them was leading by a string a fine large dog, who had evidently been stolen. I heard afterwards that this had been the case, and that some scoundrel of a servant had stolen his master's pet and sold him to our shoemaker for thirty copecks. They were going to hang it, which was their usual mode of killing dogs, then to skin it and throw the carcase into a deep cesspool which was in a corner of the yard and seldom cleaned out. The stench was terrible, especially during the hot weather. The poor dog seemed to know what was awaiting him; he looked anxiously into our faces, wagging his beautiful bushy tail slowly and timidly, as if hoping to touch our hearts by this demonstration of trust. I left them soon, and they made away with the poor creature.

We also kept a flock of geese in the prison. I never could learn to whom they had originally belonged, but they amused the convicts greatly, and were well known in the town. They had been born and bred in the kitchen. As soon as the goslings had attained a suitable age, they took it into their heads to accompany us when we went out to our work. When the drum sounded and the convicts marched towards the great gate, our geese ran after

us cackling and with outstretched wings, jumped across the threshold of the little gate, and drew up waiting patiently till the whole party had come out. They always joined themselves to the largest party, and grazed not far from it till the men began to get ready to go home, when they followed them back to the prison. It was a standing joke in the fortress that we always took our geese with us to help us in our work. 'There are the convicts with their geese,' people would say who met us in the road; 'how did you manage to teach them to follow you like that?' 'Here's a trifle for your geese,' another would say. Nevertheless, in spite of their attachment to us, they were all killed and eaten on some great holiday.

I do not think we would have killed our goat Vás'ka if we had not been forced to do it. I do not know where he came from or who brought him, but one fine day a pretty little white kid was discovered walking about our premises. In a few days he had become a universal favourite, and there was hardly a convict in the prison who did not play with him and pet him. Besides, we had a good excuse for keeping a goat, for had we not a stable, and how can a stable exist without a goat? However, he never took up his abode in the stable, but roamed about the prison and the kitchens at his own sweet will. He was a nimble, graceful little creature, full of fun, and would come when he was called, jump upon the tables and benches, and butt at the convicts. One day, when his horns had grown pretty strong, the Lesghin Babáï, who was sitting on the steps with

several others, had been playing with him. Suddenly Váss'ka jumped upon the uppermost step, and hardly had Babáï turned away when he arose upon his hind-legs, drew his fore-legs in, and making a spring at the man knocked him down the whole flight of steps, to the great delight of the lookers-on. He grew up to be a beautiful goat, with long horns, and was so fat that he waddled in walking. He also occasionally accompanied us when we went out to work, and was well known in the town as Váss'ka the prison goat. Sometimes, when the convicts were at work on the banks of the river, they would make a wreath of twigs, flowers, and leaves and wind it round his horns and body. On such occasions Váss'ka always walked in front heading the procession, the convicts following proudly and trying to attract the attention of the passers-by. They were so fond of him that they even asked once, like children, if they might not gild his horns. However, this plan was never carried out. I remember once asking Akím Akímytch, who was our next best gilder after Issaï Fomitch, whether it were possible to gild a goat's horns. He looked attentively at the goat, and after meditating a while said that such a thing might be done, but that the gilding would wear off very soon, and after all what would be the use of it? I suppose Váss'ka would have lived to a good old age if one day, when he was coming home at the head of the procession as usual, he had not met the Major in his droshki. 'Stop!' roared this functionary, 'whose goat is that?' They told him. 'What, you keep a goat in the prison without my leave!

Where is the sergeant-at-arms?' The sergeant stepped forth, and the Major commanded him to see that the goat was killed at once, his skin sold in the market, and the money put into the convicts' fund, and the flesh given them for their shtshi. We were all very sorry for our poor Váss'ka, but nobody dared disobey the Major. So he was slaughtered over the cesspool, and one of the convicts bought his carcase for 1½ roubles, cut it up, and sold it to the rest in small pieces. The 1½ roubles were spent in kalátchi. The meat was very tender and savoury.

Another of our pets was a small eagle, which had been brought into the prison half-dead. His right wing was broken and his right foot dislocated. I remember well how fiercely he looked around him, glaring at the curious crowd who had gathered round and opening his crooked beak, showing his intention of dying hard. When the crowd began to disperse he limped into a distant corner, hopping on one foot and flapping his left wing, and remained there for three months without ever leaving it once. At first the men used often to come and look at him, and even set Shárik to worry him. Shárik always made a great display of bravery, but to the great amusement of the men seemed afraid of coming too near his adversary. As time wore on, and Shárik grew more accustomed to him, he occasionally varied his mode of attack, and used to seize him by his broken wing. The eagle fought desperately with his beak and talons, and proudly eyed the people who had come to gape at him like a wounded king. They got tired of him at last, and he would have

starved to death in his corner if some one had not taken pity on him and brought him meat and water every day. For a long time he refused to eat, but at last condescended to take some food, though he would never take it from our hands, or even if any of us stood by. I have frequently watched him when he thought he was alone to see what he was doing. He would sometimes creep out of his corner and hobble a short distance along the fence, then come back to his corner and hobble out again, repeating the process ten or twelve times as if he were taking a constitutional. As soon as he caught sight of me he hurried back into his corner, and there, with ruffled wings and open beak, prepared to fight me. I never could tame him; he always hit me and flapped his wings violently, and could never be induced to take anything out of my hand, but always kept his fierce sharp eyes fixed on me. He was prepared to meet death alone without having trusted or made friends with any one.

Suddenly the convicts remembered him, though he had been forgotten for nearly two months; and it was decided to set him free—that he might not die a captive, as they said.

'Of course, he is a free bird,' observed another, 'and will never get accustomed to a prison.'

'He is different from us, then,' added some one.

'Don't you see the difference between a bird and a man, you idiot?'

'The eagle is the king of the woods, brethren,' Skourátoff began, but nobody heeded him. One day after dinner, when the drum sounded for work, one

of the men took the eagle up, and, holding his beak tight because he was trying to bite him, carried him out of the prison to the rampart. The whole party was very much interested in seeing where the eagle would fly to. They all seemed as pleased and happy as if they had been set free themselves.

'You want to do the beast good, and he bites you,' said the man who was holding him, looking lovingly at the fierce bird.

'Let him go, Mikitka.'

'Let him go: give him his freedom—his own sweet little freedom.'

The eagle was thrown down from the rampart into the steppe. It was a cold, bleak day in the latter part of autumn. The wind whistled across the bare steppe and among the yellow grass. The eagle walked straight away as fast as he could go, flapping his broken wing, the convicts following with their eyes the dark head as it moved quickly through the grass of the steppe.

'He is gone!' remarked one pensively. 'And he never once looked round!'

'Once!' added another. 'He is running away without looking round, my brother.'

'Did you think he would come back to thank you, perhaps?' observed a third. 'He is free now.'

'He is free!' echoed another.

'You don't see him any more, do you, brothers?'

'What are you gaping at, there? Go to your work at once,' shouted the soldiers; and the convicts went to their work in silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MUTINY.

I HAVE already said above that I had isolated myself as much as possible from my fellow-prisoners during the first summer that I spent in the prison. The state of my mind at that time was such that I do not think I could have been able to distinguish between the convicts, and select those who were more congenial to me, and who might hereafter have even become my friends. True, I had fellow-sufferers of my own rank and station in life; but what could they do towards removing the burden which weighed on my soul day and night?

About that time there happened an incident which I will relate here, as it will illustrate better than words can do the peculiar situation in which we noblemen were placed in the prison.

One fine hot day in August, when all the convicts were supposed to be taking their afternoon nap preparatory to setting out to work, the men suddenly marched out of the prison and drew up in the yard. If I had been less absorbed in my own sad thoughts I could not have helped noticing that there was

something unusual going on. The men had grown more sullen and quarrelsome of late, and there was a feverish restlessness and irritability about them which I had attributed to the excessively hard work done on the long tedious summer days—when the thoughts of the prisoners will involuntarily fly to the old glad life in the woods and steppes—and to the want of sleep, the nights being so short. No doubt all these different circumstances had contributed towards unsettling their minds; but the principal cause of this unexpected outbreak was the bad food. For several days past the men had been grumbling about it, and even tried to amend the state of things by turning away one of the cooks and electing a new one; but they soon repented of their decision and re-elected the old 'kitchenmaid.'

'Tis nothing but hard work, and guts to eat instead of meat!' some one would remark in the kitchen.

'Why don't you order blancmange instead?' observed another.

'Shtshi and guts,' added pensively a third, 'is my favourite dish, my brothers.'

'If you were fed on guts all the time you were here, you would be quite satisfied with your keep, wouldn't you now?'

'To be sure, they ought to give us more meat,' chimed in a fourth. 'We toil and sweat all day long in the kiln, and when we get home there's nothing but guts in the pot.'

'Tain't guts all the time; we have had a bit of the old sow's heart now and then.'

'Oh, the heart, to be sure! First-class diet, ain't it now? Guts and the old sow's heart!'

'Yes; the keep is bad enough.'

'But his pocket grows fatter every day.'

''Tis none of your business.'

''Tis my belly's business then, if it ain't mine. I say, boys, why don't we tell them plainly that we won't be starved any longer, and have done with it?'

'Do you mean to say that we ought to strike?'

'I do.'

'It won't be the first time that you have been flogged for speaking your mind, I expect.'

'Quite true,' growls another convict, who has not said anything yet; 'the quickest way is not always the best. What are you going to tell them plainly, you big-headed fool?'

'First make up your minds if you will go on starving or not, and then you will see if I don't say my say. There are some here who always buy their own dinner, while we starve on the prison food.'

'Aha! that's why we want to speak out plainly. We are coveting other people's dinners.'

'Don't open your mouth too wide to swallow another man's bit and sup, but get up betimes and fill your own.'

'Why don't you fill yours then, instead of sitting with your hands folded?'

'Geroshka is a rich man—he keeps a dog and a cat!'

'Listen to me, brothers, instead of jabbering there. There's no knowing where they will stop if

we don't put a stop to their proceedings at once. Let us rise as one man, and show them that we are not going to submit to be flayed alive!'

'I dare say you would like us to chew each morsel first and then put it into your mouth, that you may have only the trouble of swallowing it!'

''Tis the old song again: "Set the nations by the ears, O Lord, that the rulers may grow rich!"'

'That's it. Eight-eyes' purse has grown wonderfully fat of late. He bought a pair of grey horses the other day.'

'And he never touches wine, not he!'

'The night before last he and the veterinary surgeon got to loggerheads at cards. Fed'ka said so.'

'That's why our shtshi is so rich!'

'Do you think that you will carry the day by chattering like a parcel of old women?'

'I say, let us stand up and tell him that we must have better food, or else we won't bear it any longer. What will he say then?'

'He will knock out your teeth, and then you will know what he has said, and be flogged into the bargain!'

Our sergeant-at-arms, seeing the men assemble in the yard, rushed out in a great fright, followed by the invalided soldiers, who drew up opposite the mutineers. The latter politely requested the sergeant to tell the Major that they wished to speak to him personally. Never in all his life had the poor soldier found himself in such a predicament. If he refused to comply with the men's request there was no knowing how the thing might end. If, on the

other hand, he could have prevailed upon them to disperse quietly and go about their work as usual, it would still have been his duty to report to the Major what had happened; and then, what would he say? After a moment's hesitation he hurried off, pale and trembling with fear, and without making any attempt to pacify the convicts, for he knew that they would not have listened to him.

Not knowing in the least what was going on, my first thought when I saw the men assemble in the yard was that the roll was probably going to be called, and I hastened out accordingly to join them. But, not seeing any of the officers who were usually present on such occasions, I looked around, and was struck by the altered expression of the men's faces. Some were deathly pale, while others looked flushed and excited. The one prevailing thought seemed to be what they were going to say to the Major. I noticed that several stared at me as if wondering what I possibly could want there, and then turned away without speaking. They were evidently amazed at my having turned out with them, and wondered if I too was going to rebel. A few moments passed in silence, and then those who stood next to me again looked at me inquiringly.

'What dost thou want here?' gruffly asked Vassíly Antónoff, who was standing at some distance from me. He had hitherto always behaved with great politeness to me, and never thee-and-thou'd me before.

I gazed at him in blank astonishment, trying to understand what was going on, and it began to dawn

upon me that, whatever it might be, it was something unusual.

'He is right, this is no place for thee. Go back into the prison,' said a young military prisoner with whom I had never exchanged a word yet. 'Thou hast no business to be here.'

'I thought the roll was going to be called when I saw you all turn out,' said I.

'Oh! has he crept out too?' sneeringly remarked one.

'Iron-nose!' observed another.

'Fly-killer!' said a third, with an expression of infinite contempt. This new appellation met with universal approbation.

'He is the kitchenmaid's sweetheart,' added a fourth.

'They know where the good things are. We starve, and they eat kalatchi and buy sucking-pigs every day. You have no business to be here since you find your own dinners.'

'This is no place for you,' said Koulíkoff, and, marching up to me, he took me by the arm in an offhand manner and led me aside. I looked at him —his face was very pale, and there was a peculiar glitter in his dark eyes. He, too, was flurried and excited.

'You had better keep away, Alexander Petróvitch, and not get mixed up in this concern. There are all your friends in the kitchen, go and stop with them till it is all over.'

'Go and look in an empty barrel, maybe you'll find something for you there!' shouted another.

Through the open kitchen window I could see our Poles. The whole place seemed to be full of men. I followed Koulíkoff's advice, and betook myself thither. My retreat was accompanied by a volley of abuse, laughter, and a series of peculiar sounds which are used by the convicts in lieu of hissing.

'He didn't like us, did he! Tyou, tyou, tyou, sehoy!'

This was the first time that I had been so grossly insulted in the prison, and my feelings were deeply wounded. It would have been better for me if I had kept away from the men at that moment; but how could I know what was going to happen. I met T—— in the passage leading to the kitchen. He, too, was a gentleman like myself, a generous-minded youth, a great friend of B—— and a special favourite with the convicts.

'What on earth are you about, Goryántchikoff,' he called out when I came near. 'Come here. What are they about there?'

'Don't you know that they have rebelled against the governors? The worse for them, for who will pay attention to a convict's wrongs? They will try and find out the ringleaders, and you may be sure that if they catch us among the men, the suspicion will fall on us. Have you forgotten what has brought us here? The men will get off with a flogging; but we may be brought up before a court-martial. The Major hates us, and would be only too glad to find a pretext to ruin us altogether.'

'And the convicts will be sure to throw all the

blame on us,' added M—— when we entered the kitchen.

There were about thirty men assembled in the kitchen besides our own selves; all those who, partly from cowardice, partly because they foresaw that rebelling would only make matters worse, wished to remain neutral, having betaken themselves thither. There was my old friend, Akím Akímytch, the sworn enemy of rebellions and mutinies, which must have clashed terribly with his strict notions about order and morality. He was quietly and silently awaiting the end, feeling quite sure beforehand that it was all going to end well—i.e. that order and the will of our superiors would carry the day. In a corner stood Issaï Fomitch, looking very frightened and uncomfortable, listening eagerly to our talk. All the other Polish convicts had joined us, as well as a few Russians who were afraid to join the mutineers, and waited sorrowfully to see how matters would turn out. Two or three surly-looking convicts, who did not believe in mutinies, knowing that they only made matters worse, were sitting in a corner. There was Télkin, the coiner and veterinary surgeon, and our old Rasskólnik. The cooks had all remained in the kitchen, and declined to take any part in the proceedings. I suppose they looked upon themselves as forming part of the Governor's staff, in which case it would have been incompatible with their dignity to join the rebels.

'But,' said I hesitatingly, turning to M——, 'almost everyone has turned out except these few.'

'And what then?' growled B——. 'We would

run a much greater risk than they do if we joined them, and, after all, what should we gain? *Je hais les brigands.* You surely cannot be serious when you speak as if this mutiny would lead to something. Believe me, keep clear of the whole thing while you can.'

'It is all a mistake,' said one of the convicts, an obstinate old gentleman, whose temper had been soured by years of imprisonment. Almasoff, who had also retreated to the kitchen, immediately agreed with him. 'The only thing they will gain by it is a flogging,' said he.

'The Major has arrived!' cried some one, and we all ran to the windows.

The Major rushed into the yard, his face purple and swelled with rage, and walked up straight to the men without speaking a word, but with a firm step. In such moments he never lost his presence of mind, and was as brave as a lion, though I always suspected him of having stimulated his courage by something stronger than water. There was something ominous in the look of his greasy cap, with its orange-coloured border, and his tarnished epaulets. He was followed by the regimental clerk, Dyátleff, a very important personage, who did all the writing and had a great deal of influence over the Major. The convicts liked him, for he was a good-tempered young man, who never willingly harmed any one. The rear was brought up by our sergeant-at-arms, poor fellow, who looked very much crestfallen, and three or four soldiers. The convicts, who had been standing without their caps ever since they had sent for the Major, drew

themselves up, and stood stock still, waiting for their officer to speak, or rather to scream at them.

They had not long to wait, for the Major at once shrieked out something which we could not hear, owing to the distance. We could see him from the windows rushing frantically up and down, pointing at some men, and evidently asking questions. From time to time some incoherent words would reach us, such as: 'Rebels! Mutineers! I will flog you within an inch of your lives! You are at the bottom of the whole thing! And you! And you!' with a sudden spring at the culprit.

We could not hear the men's answers; but we saw a moment after a convict detach himself from the rest, and go off in the direction of the guard-room. He was followed by a second, and soon after by a third.

'I shall have you all brought up before a court-martial, you dogs! Who's that in the kitchen?' yelled he, suddenly looking up and catching sight of our faces at the kitchen windows. 'Call them at once. Send them here this moment!'

Dyátleff obeyed; but we told him we had retreated to the kitchen because we wished to remain neutral. When our answer was reported to the Major he seemed pleased. 'Oh, indeed,' said he; 'but tell them to come here all the same.'

We obeyed. I must confess that I felt rather ashamed of myself, and so did the rest, as we passed by the men.

'Ah, Prokófyeff, you are here; and you too Télkin and Almasoff—that's right. Come here,

stand all together on this side,' said the Major in a softer voice, looking kindly at us. 'M—ky, you are here too. Dyátleff, put down the names of the rebels on one sheet of paper, and the names of the others on another, and let me have the list. I shall have you up before a court-martial before long, you scoundrels.'

The mention of the list had a visible effect on the convicts.

'We don't want to rebel,' a voice in the crowd called out hesitatingly.

'Very well. Let all those who are contented stand aside.'

'We are all contented, and we don't want to rebel!' cried several voices.

'Who has been at work among you, setting you up against your superiors? They will be sorry for it!'

'Good Lord, how is this going to end?' exclaimed a voice in the crowd.

'Who was that? who, who?' shrieked the Major, turning sharply round. 'It was you, Rastorgoúeff. To the guard-room with you!'

Rastorgoúeff, a tall young man with puffy cheeks, slowly obeyed. He had not opened his mouth once; but since it had pleased the Major to accuse him, he did not even attempt an explanation.

'I'll break your will yet, my fine gentleman,' howled the Major after him. 'You fat unwashed pig! I shall find out the ringleaders, you will see if I don't. Are you contented or discontented?'

'We are contented, most high-born one!' cried a

few gruff voices, while the rest maintained a stubborn silence. But the Major, who was anxious to get the matter settled as soon as possible, pretended not to notice it.

'I am glad to see that you are *all* contented,' said he hurriedly. 'I know that you would never have thought of rebelling if you had not been worked upon by agitators. The matter must be inquired into carefully,' he added, turning to Dyátleff. 'And now go to your work. Sound the drum.'

He waited to see us all off. The men dispersed in gloomy silence, not displeased at finding themselves let off so easily. The Major then betook himself to the guardroom, where the 'ringleaders and agitators' were awaiting their doom. None of them were punished very severely, and it was even said that he pardoned one man at once who had asked his forgiveness. It was clear that he felt ill at ease, and not a little frightened at this sudden outbreak in the prison, which could neither be called a riot or mutiny, as no act of violence or insubordination had been committed, and the men had merely begged leave to speak to him about some personal grievances. The matter was hushed up, and on the next day a marked improvement in our dietary took place, which, however, unfortunately did not last long. The Major paid frequent visits to the prison in the course of the next few days and found fault with everything. Our poor sergeant-at-arms wandered about the place, looking careworn and preoccupied, and unable to recover from the effect of the moral blow he had

received. The convicts seemed much disappointed with the final result of their conspiracy; some hung their heads as if ashamed of themselves, others gave vent to their displeasure in sarcastic remarks about each other and themselves. In short, everybody felt wretched and uncomfortable for a long time after.

'Riots are capital things after all,' one would remark.

'Never laugh at your master, for you have got to work for him,' added a second.

'Where is the mouse who tied the bell round the cat's neck,' said a third.

'The best way to make us feel that we are in the wrong is to flog us. I wonder he did not flog every one of us.'

'Next time we rebel you had better hold your tongue,' angrily remarked a third.

'Who are you that you want to teach me, pray?'

'I know what I am talking about, and you don't always.'

'Bless me, how wise you have grown all of a sudden!'

'Well, thank Heaven, I am a man with brains in my head. And what are you?'

'You call yourself a man. You are a bone which no dog would eat.'

'That's just what you are yourself.'

'Shut up, there!' bawled the other convicts.

On the evening of this memorable day, as I was coming home, I met Petróff behind the prison. He had been looking for me everywhere, and came up to me murmuring something which I did not quite

catch, but soon lapsed into silence, and walked on mechanically by my side. I was still very much excited by the events of the day, and wanted to talk them over with him.

'Tell me, Petróff,' asked I, 'are your friends very angry with us?'

'Who is angry?' asked he, in a startled tone, as if he had been suddenly awakened from sleep.

'I mean, are the convicts displeased with us noblemen?'

'What for?'

'Because we did not join them to-day.'

'Why should you join us?' replied he, as if trying to understand my meaning; 'you find your own dinners.'

'Good heavens, Petróff! There are many of your friends who find their own dinners, and yet they joined the rebels. Don't you think that we ought to have done it for the sake of good-fellowship?'

'But you don't belong to us,' said he, in a puzzled tone.

I glanced at him. He seemed unable to make out what I was driving at in my questions. But I understood him only too well, and I knew now what I had only vaguely suspected before—that there was a barrier between him and me which nothing would ever remove. Even if I had remained a convict all my life, or been a military prisoner in the Special Department, and lived there and died among them, that would never have brought us any nearer to each other, for I was not one of them—I was altogether

a different being. I shall never forget the expression of Petróff's face when he said, 'But you don't belong to us.' I was at first inclined to think that he was sneering at me, or that he had been prompted to say so from a feeling of hatred, but I was wrong there. I did not belong to their set, that was all. They went their way, and expected me to go mine; they minded their own business, and I minded mine.

I had feared at first that they would make us suffer for having remained neutral; but there I was mistaken again. The matter was hardly ever alluded to, and if it was nobody thought of blaming us for not having taken a more active part in it. They sneered at us and abused us as they had done before, but that had nothing to do with our behaviour at the time of the mutiny. Neither were they angry with those men who belonged to their own set, and who had prudently retreated to the kitchen till the storm had blown over, or even with those who had given in first and told the Major that they were contented. I never could understand why they should have been so lenient to them.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ESCAPE.

After our Major left, great changes took place in our prison. The civil prison was converted into a military prison. No fresh civil criminals were sent to us, but the old ones were allowed to remain till their term of imprisonment had expired, when they left the penal establishment. The Special Department remained unchanged, as it had been originally instituted for military criminals, and from time to time important criminals were still sent to it. The government of our prison had also been changed. It consisted now of a staff officer, one commandant (as he was called), and four officers. The invalided soldiers were discharged, and twelve subaltern officers took their place. The convicts were divided into groups of ten men each, and a senior, called corporal, appointed to each group. I need not say that Akím Akímytch was at once elected as corporal.

Naturally enough, the convicts were at first much excited by these new arrangements, and the new government was a good deal talked over and criticised; but when they saw that after all things

remained much the same as they had been, they soon calmed down again, and our life went on as usual, with the exception that we breathed more freely since we had got rid of the Major. The men no longer looked scared—they knew that in case of need they might always appeal to the Governor, and that if perchance the innocent were punished instead of the guilty it would be by mistake. The liquor trade also flourished much as it had done before, in spite of the vigilance of the subaltern officers. To do these worthies justice, they soon understood their position, and let the convicts do very much as they liked. At first one or two had attempted to bully them, and treat them as if they had been soldiers; but they were soon made to understand reason. A few disagreeable incidents happened, of course. Thus, for instance, the convicts would persuade a sub to join them in their drinking bouts, and the next day calmly tell him that he could not well report the occurrence to the Governor, as he had partaken of their hospitality.

Finally the convicts brought liquor into the prison openly in bottles under the very eyes of the subs, who pretended not to see it, and who even volunteered to buy our provisions for us in the town as the invalided soldiers had done.

After the Major left, his old favourite, A——, remained in the prison alone, without a friend or protector. I suppose he would have been glad enough to continue his old tricks, spying and doing all kinds of underhand things, if he had only been free, and would probably have managed things better and more

cleverly than he had done the first time, when he paid dearly for his folly. The convicts affirmed that while he was in the Major's kitchen he had forged passports, and made a considerable profit by it; but I cannot answer for the truth of this assertion. He was one of the most cynical men I knew, and always awakened in me a feeling of invincible repugnance. I always thought that if he had longed for a glass of liquor, and could not get it except by committing a murder, he would have done so at once, provided it could have been done in secret. In a word, he was one of those desperadoes who will do anything to change their lot, and just the sort of man the convict Koulíkoff wanted to help him in carrying out his plans. I think I have mentioned Koulíkoff already. He was a middle-aged man, of strong passions, highly gifted in many ways, and thirsting for an active life. I do not know which of them had greater influence over the other. Anyhow, they became intimate friends. I suppose that Koulíkoff had expected A—— would forge the passports; besides, the latter was a gentleman by birth, and had moved in good society, all which would give an additional zest to their adventures, if only they could get safely to Russia. Koulíkoff was a born actor, who might have played any *rôle* to perfection. The next step was to find an escort who was willing to escape with them, as it is impossible to run away without the escort. They soon found the man they wanted. There served in one of the battalions which were in garrison in the fortress a man of remarkable energy and talents, who deserved a better fate. He was a

Pole by birth, a grave-looking, stately soldier. In his youth he had come to Siberia with his regiment; but his heart yearned for his distant country; he pined away, and finally deserted from his regiment and tried to make his way back to Poland. He was caught, punished, and sent for two years to a reformatory battalion. When he came back to his regiment after the expiration of his sentence, he was a changed man; he became a most zealous soldier, and was made a corporal for his good behaviour. He was a very ambitious man, and had a high opinion of himself. His name was Koller. I had occasionally seen him among our escorts, and the Poles had told me his history.

Everything was arranged for the flight, and the day fixed. It was in June. The climate is pretty constant in this part of Siberia, the summers are hot, and it seldom rains. This is just the weather for vagabonds. It stands to reason that they could not run away straight from the prison, as the town stands on a plain, and there are no woods near, so that they might easily have been discovered unless they changed their dress. Koulíkoff had had everything prepared beforehand in the house of some friends of his who lived in the suburbs. I do not know whether his friends were let into the secret, as this point was never fully elucidated at the trial. There lived also in the said suburbs a young lady on whom Koulíkoff had been spending a small fortune for the last year, who rejoiced in the euphonious name of Van'ka Tan'ka, *alias* 'Firebrand,' and who seemed to have known something about the proceed-

ings. The conspirators turned out as usual when the roll was called in the morning, and managed so cleverly that they were sent with the convict Shilkine, a mason by trade, to work in some empty barracks, the soldiers having left for their summer quarters. The walls of the barracks had to be stuccoed afresh, and A—— and Koulikoff were to help Shilkine in his work. Koller was chosen to escort them, and, as three convicts could not go out without being escorted by two soldiers, Koller was entrusted with the charge of a raw young recruit, who was ordered to accompany them that he might be instructed by Koller in the duties of an escort. It is difficult to understand what could have made this clever, thoughtful, experienced old soldier, who was the favourite of his superiors, join the two men in their desperate enterprise. They must have had a great influence over him!

When they got to the barracks it was 6 A.M., and there was nobody there but themselves. After working for about an hour, the conspirators told Shilkine that they must go back to the workshop, as they had made an appointment to meet some one there, and besides they wanted to fetch an instrument which they had forgotten to bring. They had to be very cautious as to what they told him, for Shilkine was a shrewd fellow who might easily have suspected mischief. He was a Moscovite by birth; and, as I have said before, a potter and mason by trade. He was such a puny-looking, miserable wretch that one could not help wondering what on earth he could have done to deserve such a fate, for

he was in the Special Department. I cannot tell what crime he had committed; he was very quiet and peaceful, and, though he got drunk occasionally, he always even at such times behaved with great propriety. Koulíkoff took the precaution of dropping a hint that they might perhaps also bring a certain bottle of brandy which they had hidden in the workshop. This touched Shilkine's heart, and he let them go, and remained alone with his recruit, while Koulíkoff, A——, and Koller made for the suburbs.

When half an hour had elapsed and nobody reappeared, Shilkine began to suspect mischief. He remembered that Koulíkoff had seemed excited, that A—— had whispered something to him once or twice, and that Koulíkoff had winked at him. Then Koller, too, had behaved in rather an unusual way. Before leaving he had given the young recruit a few directions about what he was to do in his absence, and that was a thing Koller would hardly have done if he had only gone away for half an hour. The more he thought about it all, the more his suspicions increased. Hour after hour passed and they did not come. The poor fellow was in a terrible state of anxiety, for he knew that, naturally enough, he would at once be accused of having connived at their escape, especially if he hesitated any longer to give the alarm. He had no time to lose. He remembered that Koulíkoff and A—— seemed to have become very intimate of late; he had frequently seen them whispering together in the courtyard; there could hardly be any doubts left as to their having

escaped. He looked inquiringly at his escort; but the young soldier stood leaning on his musket and yawning with such a stolid expression of countenance that he did not even take the trouble to communicate his fears to him, but merely asked him to follow him to the workshop. He tried to persuade himself that they might still be there, but nobody had seen them. Once the thought crossed his mind that they might have gone off to some tavern in the suburbs, as Koulikoff had been in the habit of doing lately; but he dismissed it as wholly improbable, for in that case they would have told him, there being no obvious reason why they should have kept it concealed from him. So Shilkine left his work and went straight to the prison to give the alarm. It was nearly nine o'clock when he told the sergeant-at-arms what had happened. The sergeant would not believe him at first, and then rushed off in hot haste to the Major, who in his turn hastened to report the event to the Commandant. A quarter of an hour later all the necessary steps had been taken to pursue the fugitives. Even the Governor-General was informed of the occurrence, as two of the men were important criminals, and if the news of the escape reached St. Petersburg the Government would certainly be very much displeased. A—— was reckoned among the political criminals, why I know not; and Koulikoff belonged to the Special Department—that is to say, he was an arch-malefactor and military prisoner. This was the first time since the Special Department existed that any one had escaped from it, and it suddenly occurred to some one that the regulation which

demanded that every prisoner of the Special Department should have an escort of two soldiers, or one at least, had of late been very much neglected. All this might have very disagreeable consequences. Couriers were despatched to every town and place in the neighbourhood to give the alarm, and leave the description of the fugitives; Cossacks were sent in pursuit—in a word, our governors were terribly frightened.

Meanwhile the news had spread like wildfire in the prison, and was received with great glee by the convicts, who hailed it as a welcome diversion in their monotonous life. Such an event was sure to find an echo in each soul, and to waken memories and thoughts that had long been slumbering in some forgotten corner. If these men had escaped, why should not others run away? A sudden change seemed to have come over the prisoners; they walked more erect than usual, and began to look down upon the subs. The Governor, accompanied by his staff, presently arrived in the prison. The men received him with a certain superciliousness, as if they wished to impress upon him that they might have run away every one of them if only they had been so disposed. They had expected this visit, and taken good care to hide anything that might awaken suspicion. There was a great deal of bustling about and hunting for forbidden articles; the officers looked everywhere and found—nothing. We went to our afternoon work with a double escort; and at night when we were locked up in our rooms the warders kept popping in and out to make sure that we were all there.

The roll was called twice over in our cells, and each time there was a fresh mistake made: then we were all turned out into the yard, and the roll called again, this time without a mistake. Then we were all counted a fourth time in our cells. In a word, our poor warders gave themselves a great deal of needless trouble.

The convict prisoners affected rather a supercilious demeanour, and, as is generally the case at such times, behaved extremely well all night, so that it was impossible to find fault with them. Naturally enough our Governor suspected the fugitives of having allies in the prison, and our warders had been directed to keep their eyes and ears well open in case they might discover some clue as to their whereabouts. All these precautions only afforded the convicts infinite amusement.

'I suppose they think that people who intend to run away leave word where they are to be found.'

'Did they expect them to ask their leave?'

'Surely both those chaps, Koulikoff and A——, know how to manage their business well enough. They have gone through fire and water in their lives; why should they not pass through locked doors?'

In short, Koulikoff and A—— suddenly became great heroes in the eyes of the rest: we were proud of having had such men among us. It was universally believed that their deed was unprecedented in the annals of the prison, and that it would survive long after the prison had ceased to exist.

'Clever chaps!' remarked some.

'And people think that nobody ever escaped from our prison! I wonder what they will say when they hear of this!' added another.

'Escaped!' cried a third, glancing contemptuously at the second speaker, 'who has escaped? Not you, I expect!'

At any other time the convict who was thus ignominiously snubbed would have resented the injury, and a brawl would have been the immediate consequence; but to-night he held his tongue, and contented himself with remarking modestly that after all everybody was not like Koulíkoff and A——.

'What are we doing here, my brothers?' suddenly remarked in a singsong voice a fourth, who was sitting in a corner by the kitchen window leaning his head on his hand. 'What are we doing here in this dead-alive place? E-e-ekh!'

'Do you think escaping from prison is as easily done as taking off one's shoes? E-e-ekh!' (mimicking him).

'But if Koulíkoff has run away——' imprudently remarks an impetuous youth.

'Koulíkoff!' interrupts another, with a withering look at the impetuous youth; 'Koulíkoff!' That is to say, 'Are there many Koulíkoffs in this world?'

'And A—— is a knowing chap too, my brethren.'

'I should think so. Koulíkoff is like wax in his hands.'

'I wonder how far they have got by this time?'

And forthwith they begin to speculate how far they have got. In what direction? Which way

would be the safest to take? and so on. It so happened that some of the men knew the country all around pretty well: they related their past experiences, and were listened to eagerly. They agreed unanimously as to the inhabitants of the neighbouring towns and villages being covetous and avaricious, who would not hesitate a moment to catch a poor convict and deliver him up to the magistrates.

'They are a bad lot all about here, my brethren—a wretched set!'

'D——d curs!'

'It's no joke to fall into the hands of a Siberian peasant, I can tell you. They'll kill you before you know where you are.'

'They will have hard work to catch our fellows!'

'To be sure.'

'Well, we'll hear all about it if we live long enough.'

'Do you mean to say that you think they'll catch them?'

'I don't think that they will ever be caught in this life!' shouts another, striking the table with his fist.

'H'm, we'll see, we'll see.'

'Don't you think, my brothers,' suddenly interrupts Skourátoff, 'that it would be a tough job to catch me if I were a vagabond?'

Some of the men laugh, while others turn away as if disgusted with his levity. But all this is lost upon Skourátoff, whom nothing can stop when he is once fairly launched.

'They'd never catch me in this life!' he repeats

with greater energy than before. 'I would rather squeeze through a keyhole than be caught.'

'Wait till you get hungry, and then you will go quick enough to some peasant and ask for bread.'

All laugh.

'Ask for bread? Not I!'

'We know better. You have come here for killing the cow's death,[1] together with your uncle Vass'ka, have you not?'

The hilarity becomes uproarious. The more serious convicts look on with infinite disgust.

'You lie!' shrieks Skourátoff. 'Mikitka has been telling tales about me—that is, not about me, but about Vass'ka, and you have mixed us both up. I have been born and bred a vagabond. I am a Muscovite by birth. I remember, when I was a boy and went to school, the dyatchók[2] used to pull me by the ears to make me remember the prayer, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for Thy infinite goodness' sake," and so on; and I would repeat after him, "Send me to prison for Thy great goodness' sake," and so on. That's what I did when I was a youngster.'

Skourátoff's reminiscences of his boyhood were received with another shout of laughter, to his infinite satisfaction. But this was no time for jesting. The older and more experienced men were talking the great event over gravely among themselves, while the younger and more inexperienced crowded round

[1] I.e. he has killed a peasant who has been accused of bewitching cows and oxen.

[2] Clerk of a church, who frequently keeps a small school.

them listening in deferential silence. Almost all the prisoners had assembled in the kitchen. Fortunately there were no subs present, else they would have hardly dared to speak their minds freely. Among the many eager faces I especially noticed Mamétka's. He was Tartar by birth—a short, bony, queer-looking fellow, who understood little or no Russian; but there he was in the crowd, pressing forward eagerly to listen to what was being said. Skourátoff, who to his great grief had been obliged to be silent because nobody would attend to him, could not resist the temptation of teasing him. 'Well, Mamétka, yakshi?'

'Yakshi, yakshi!' murmured Mamétka, grinning with delight and nodding his head at Skourátoff, 'yakshi.'

'Will they catch them? Yok?'

'Yok, yok,' chattered Mamétka, gesticulating wildly.

'Six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. Ain't it so, old fellow?'

'Yes, yes. Yakshi,' nodding his head again.

'Yakshi, yakshi!' laughed Skourátoff, knocking Mamétka's cap over his eyes, and walking out of the kitchen in a highly elated frame of mind, leaving Mamétka very much astonished at the unexpected turn their conversation had taken.

A whole week passed without our hearing anything of the fugitives. We were guarded and watched over with the greatest care. All the peasants in the neighbouring districts had been put to requisition, every swamp and wood where they might be hidden

was carefully searched—but in vain. The convicts were perfectly well informed of all the steps that had been taken by the local government to trace the fugitives, and it was a mystery to me in what way the information was conveyed to the prison. All fears and doubts concerning the fate of A—— and Koulíkoff had vanished. 'They won't catch them,' the men would say with a self-satisfied smile. 'Catch them? Not they!'

'Farewell, I shall come again soon!'

'I suppose they have found a hiding-place somewhere,' remarked some one.

'Certainly,' affirmed another. 'You may be sure that they had prepared everything before they left.'

Others suggested that the fugitives might be even hidden somewhere in a cellar in some house in the suburbs, biding their time, and waiting till the alarm had subsided and their hair had grown. They might stay there for six months, a year even, and then go off. In a word, the most romantic stories about all sorts of probable and improbable hiding-places were circulated and believed by the convicts, when suddenly, on the eighth day, the rumour spread that the pursuers had come upon their track. This was naturally repudiated with great scorn. But the very same night the rumour was confirmed, and the convicts began to grow uneasy. The next day it was said in the town that they had been caught, and were now on their way back to the prison. In the afternoon we learnt the particulars of their capture. They had been caught in a village about seventy versts from the town. Then the sergeant was summoned

to the Major, and on his return he informed us officially that they would arrive this very evening, and be taken straight to the guard-room.

It is difficult to define the impression which this intelligence produced. At first the convicts were downright angry with the fugitives, then they seemed cast down for a time, and finally manifested a strong inclination to scoff at them. One or two ventured a few sarcastic remarks, and the rest followed their example, with the exception of a few strong-minded men who had the courage to think for themselves, and who looked on in silent disgust.

If Koulikoff and A—— had ranked highest in the esteem of their fellow-prisoners only a short time ago, they had sunk very low now. It was related with great scorn that they had been driven by hunger to ask for bread in a village, which, I must remark here, is considered an act of cowardice unworthy even of a vagabond. This tale, however, soon turned out to be false. The fugitives had been tracked to a wood, which had been surrounded by people, whereupon they surrendered themselves, as it was impossible to escape.

When at last, towards nightfall, they arrived, bound hand and foot and escorted by mounted soldiers, we all rushed to the fence to look through the chinks and see what was going to happen. But we were disappointed, as nothing could be seen except the Major's and the Commandant's carriages standing at the door of the guard-room. The fugitives were immediately locked up, and brought up for trial the next day. When it became known that they had

been obliged to surrender themselves to their captors, the convicts relented in their feelings towards the culprits, and followed the trial with great interest.

'They'll get a thousand apiece,' asserted one.

'Only a thousand! They'll kill them for sure. A—— may perhaps be let off with a paltry thousand strokes; but they'll kill the others, for they are of the Special Department.'

But they were mistaken. A—— was sentenced only to five hundred strokes. His former good conduct was taken into consideration, and the doctors interceded for him. Koulíkoff was sentenced to fifteen hundred strokes. They were punished less severely than might have been expected. It was said that they gave very clear and satisfactory answers at their trial, implicating no one. I felt especially sorry for Koller, poor fellow. He had ruined all his prospects in life for ever; was sentenced to two thousand strokes, and sent away to some distant prison.

A—— bragged very much about his deed in the hospital, and informed everybody that he was quite ready to do it again. Koulíkoff was as dignified as usual, and when he came back to the prison after the flogging he looked and behaved as if he had never left it. But the convicts were of a different opinion, and, in spite of his dignified manner, respected him less than they had done before his escapade. He was no longer a hero in their eyes. What is it to be successful in this world!

CHAPTER XX.

I LEAVE THE PRISON.

The incidents which I have related in the last chapter occurred during the last year of my captivity. In looking back upon this time now it seems to me as if, of all those dreary ten years, the first and the last had been the most remarkable, so clearly do I remember every trifling incident which happened in them. In spite of my intense desire to be free once more I began to find my life much less hard than it had been during the previous years. In the first place, I had succeeded at last in making friends with several convicts, who had finally arrived at the conclusion that I was not a bad man. Some of them were even sincerely attached to me—e.g. the pioneer, who nearly cried when my comrade and I left the prison. We had to remain in the town for another month before leaving the place altogether, and hardly a day passed without his coming to call on us, just to take a look at us, as he used to say. Others, it is true, remained cold and repellent to the very last, and hardly ever exchanged a word with me.

In the second place, I enjoyed more liberty during this memorable last year. I found out, by a mere

chance, that some of my old schoolfellows were among the officers who were in garrison in the town. I renewed our acquaintance, and they helped me to the utmost of their power. I had more money at my disposal, was able to write to my friends once more, and, what was the greatest boon of all, they gave me books to read. I had been denied that pleasure for many years, and it is difficult to describe the mixed sensation of joy and bitterness with which I read the first book. It happened to be an odd number of some magazine. I remember sitting down to read it one evening, after we had been locked in for the night, and never stopping till the day dawned and the *réveille* was sounded at the gates. I felt as if a message had been sent me from another world; my past life rose clearly and vividly before me, and I could not help asking myself wonderingly whether I was still the same as before? What were they doing now in the world? What new interests and leading questions had sprung up since I had left it? I pondered over each word, trying to read between the lines some mysterious hints about old times, or to find some traces at least of the questions that had interested the world in my days. In vain; I had become a stranger to this present world, I no longer had a right to claim fellowship with my own generation. I remember especially devouring eagerly one paper which was signed in a name which I well knew, the bearer of which had many years ago been very dear to my heart.

But I did not meet with many old friends in my reading. New names had supplanted the old ones,

new actors had come upon the stage; and as I hastened to become acquainted with them I could not help feeling vexed that my supply of books must necessarily be a very limited one, and I should have so much trouble in getting even those few. Still, I ought to have been thankful for the opportunities which were thus afforded me to still the craving of my soul for food, as in the reign of our old Major it would have been well-nigh impossible to smuggle books into the prison. And even if I had succeeded in smuggling them in, the chances were ten to one that they might have been discovered, and there would have been no end to the questions and suspicions as to where the books had come from, who had given them to me, with whom I was in correspondence, etc. And then, for nine long years living without books, I felt my inner life grow deeper, while I tried to answer innumerable questions that were constantly springing up in my mind——; but it is impossible to attempt to describe or even analyse such feelings—they can only be experienced, not described.

I had arrived at the convict prison in winter, and was to leave it accordingly on the same day of the same month. How impatiently I watched for the approach of the cold season! With what joy I hailed the first signs of autumn, when the leaves on the trees began to fade and wither, and the grass of the steppe grew yellow! The autumn winds whistled round our prison; then the first snow fell, and the much-longed-for winter had come at last. My heart beat quicker at the thought that the moment which I had been longing for for many years, and picturing to myself

in different ways, was drawing near at last. And yet, instead of feeling impatient at the long delay, I seemed to grow more and more patient as the time of my release drew near, and I frequently reproached myself for my indifference. Often when I was walking in the yard, other convicts would come up to me and congratulate me.

'So you are going to leave us soon, Father Alexander Petróvitch? We shall feel quite lonely without you.'

'But you will soon be going too, Martynoff?' I asked.

'I? Oh, yes; in seven years or more!' And the poor fellow sighed, and there was a wistful expression in his eyes, as if he tried to pierce the veil which hid the future from him.

Yes, many of my fellow-convicts wished me joy heartily and sincerely; and it seemed to me as if almost every one grew more friendly and affable towards me. I was no longer their comrade, the drudge on whom they had vented their ill-humour, but a gentleman who was going to leave them soon, and they behaved accordingly. K——, a Polish nobleman, a quiet and gentle young man, who, like myself, was very fond of walking in the yard, hoping to counteract by exercise and fresh air the injurious effect of the bad air in the prison, met me one day as we were both taking our constitutional.

'I am quite impatient to see you go away,' said he to me with a smile, 'for I shall know then that I shall have to stay here only for another year.'

Let me remark here that in the minds of the

convicts the idea of freedom is apt to be magnified to the very utmost. A ragged officer's servant is to them the ideal of a free man compared with them, because he is free to go about unshaved, without an escort, and unfettered.

On the eve of my departure I walked for the last time round our yard. How many thousand times had I wearily dragged myself along the fence! Behind those barracks I had wandered about during the first year of my captivity alone, and almost beside myself with grief. I remembered my then counting how many thousands of days I would still have to remain there. How very distant that time seemed to me now! Here, in this corner, lived our poor eagle, and that was the spot where Petróff used often to meet me. He still clung to me, and would frequently appear suddenly before me, and, as if he guessed my thoughts, walk silently by my side with a look of placid astonishment on his face. I said farewell to the dingy prison walls in my heart, and as I remembered with a shudder the terrible impression which they had wrought on me when I beheld them for the first time, I thought of all the young lives and gifted minds that were dying slowly behind them. Early the next morning, before the convicts went to their work, I paid a farewell call to all the cells to bid good-bye to my old fellow-prisoners. Many a hard-worked rough hand was stretched out to grasp mine in friendly greeting. A few shook hands with me as they would with one of their own class, while others hung back and hardly dared to touch my proffered hand. They remembered that I was no longer their fellow-

prisoner, but a gentleman, and that the moment I left the prison I should once more take my place among the 'quality' of the town. There was an undertone of respect in their farewell greeting more like that of a servant bidding good-bye to his master than that of a comrade parting from his fellow. Others turned away, and did not deign to answer me; while some scowled at me still with undisguised hatred.

The drum beat, and they all went off to their work except ourselves. Soushíloff had got up very early that morning to get me some tea. Poor Soushíloff! he burst into tears when I gave him my shirts, a few other trifles, and a little money.

'I don't want anything,' said he, trying very hard to master his emotion; 'I was thinking what is to become of me when you are gone, Alexander Petróvitch. I shall be so lonely without you!'

I said farewell to Akím Akímytch for the last time.

'You will be soon free, too,' said I to him.

'Oh, no, no, no,' murmured he, pressing my hand, 'I shall have to stay here a good while yet.' I threw my arms round his neck, and we kissed each other.

Ten minutes after the convicts had left the prison we also left it—my comrade with whom I had come here and I—never to return any more. First of all we had to go to the forge to have our chains taken off. But this time no soldier accompanied us with his loaded gun. A sergeant-at-arms led the way. Our own fellow-prisoners took off our chains in the engineer's workshop. I let my comrade go first, and

then went up to the anvil. The men turned me round with my back to them, and lifting my leg they placed it on the anvil. They were eager to do their best, poor fellows!

'Turn that rivet first of all,' commanded the head man. 'Put it this way. And now hammer away.'

My chains fell off! I picked them up. I longed to hold them once more in my hands, and look at them for the last time. I could hardly realise that they had been on my feet only a moment ago.

'God bless you! God bless you!' said the convicts gruffly, but not unkindly.

Ay, may God bless my going out once more into the wide, free world! Liberty! Glorious sound! I am free once more! I have risen from the dead!

[The editor of the Memoirs of the late Alexander Petróvitch Goryántchikoff considers it his duty to say a few words here on the subject of a young parricide of whom mention was made in the first chapter of these Memoirs. It will be remembered that he was quoted as an example of the callousness with which convicts speak of their crimes. It was also said, that in spite of the strong evidence for his guilt, he persisted in maintaining that he was innocent of the crime imputed to him; and that he was in excellent spirits during the whole time of his imprisonment, and never showed the slightest sign of repentance for his deed. The author remarks: 'I could not bring myself to believe that he was really guilty.'

A few days ago the editor received the intelligence from Siberia that the young man had been found guilty

of a crime of which he was innocent. The real criminals had been discovered and confessed their guilt, and the unfortunate victim had been set free at once.

Such facts speak for themselves. It would be needless to comment any further on this tragedy of a life crushed in its prime under the weight of such a terrible accusation. We think that the mere fact of such an injustice being possible is perhaps one of the most characteristic traits of the picture we have been endeavouring to paint of the life of those who are buried alive.]

THE END.

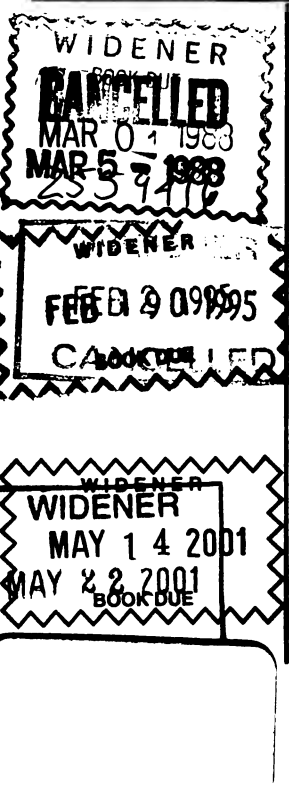
LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

2760 048

ACME
BOOKBINDING CO., INC.

FEB 21 1985

100 CAMBRIDGE STREET
CHARLESTOWN, MASS.

3 2044 024 302 747

THE BORROWER WILL BE CHARGED AN OVERDUE FEE IF THIS BOOK IS NOT RETURNED TO THE LIBRARY ON OR BEFORE THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW. NON-RECEIPT OF OVERDUE NOTICES DOES NOT EXEMPT THE BORROWER FROM OVERDUE FEES.